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TYPES

OF

TRAGIC DRAMA

BY

C. E. VAUGHAN

PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH LITERATURE IN THE UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

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PREFACE

THE following pages make no pretension to completeness. They are, in fact, a reproduction, more or less faithful, of a course of lectures delivered to a general audience in this University during the winter of 1906. Each lecture was written out within a week after delivery; and the result, I believe, commonly represents the substance of what was then said. Some of the lectures, however, have been expanded, and a section on the dramas of Victor Hugo has been added.

I have made no attempt to alter the lecture form, nor to remove the roughnesses and unshaded statements which are almost inseparable from spoken utterance. In order to get rid of these defects, the whole thing must have been recast from top to bottom; and it is probable that more would have been lost than gained in the process.

No one could be more keenly alive to these, and other, defects than I am. In particular, I must regret that limits of time have often compelled me

either to indicate important considerations, instead of working them out with some approach to completeness, or to omit them altogether. This is especially the case with the last lecture. And I can only hope that the limitations under which I spoke may be borne in mind. I may perhaps say that, having seen a performance of *A Doll's House* while these sheets were in the press, I am now less disposed to question its dramatic truth than I was when I wrote the words on p. 268.

I have to express my warmest thanks to my colleague, Professor Rhys Roberts, who kindly revised the first five lectures, and to Professor Herford, who did the like service ungrudgingly for the whole. Without their aid, the defects of the book would have been still more numerous and glaring than they are.

C. E. VAUGHAN.

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LECTURE I

INTRODUCTORY

THE subject of the following Lectures is extremely, perhaps unduly, wide, and it is manifest that the treatment must be summary and imperfect. It is only possible to take the most general points, and to handle them in the most general manner. What then may we hope to gain from such a study? What purpose may it be expected to serve? It is something surely to study the growth of any one form in which the imagination of man has taken body; above all, when the form in question is that on which the highest poetic genius has been spent. And we may perhaps go further than this. We may hope, I trust, to extend our knowledge of the treasures offered by imaginative art; and, with this object, I shall always base what I have to say upon particular dramas; upon those which common consent has pronounced to be the most characteristic. And, what is yet more important, we may hope to gain something of that

comprehensiveness of view, that liberality, that tolerance, without which we can never enter into the spirit of poetry, or indeed of imaginative art in any form. The House Beautiful, like another house still nobler and more sacred, has many mansions. And if in the course of these Lectures we are led to realise that truth, we shall not have spent our time in vain.

At the outset we shall do well to anticipate, loosely and broadly, the results at which we may expect to arrive; to map out, in a very general way, the ground we are about to traverse. There are, it is generally admitted, two main types of tragic drama—those known to critics under the names classical and romantic. The classical type, in its purest form, is that which belongs to the tragedy of ancient Greece. It is also that which appears in what remains to us of Latin tragedy and in the drama of modern Italy and of France. It reappears, finally, in some of the most remarkable work of Goethe and of Schiller. The romantic type, on the other hand, is an essentially modern creation. It is the type taken by the tragic drama of Spain; by that of the Elizabethans; by the most characteristic creations of Goethe and Schiller; by those of Browning, so far as, in any sense, his genius was capable of lending itself to the limits of the stage; and finally, though in a very special form, by the efforts of Hugo and the "romantic"

dramatists of France. It need hardly be said—for the same applies to all literary classifications—that each of these main types includes under it several subordinate forms. But it is well to insist from the outset that it is often extremely difficult to say under which of the main types a given play should properly be brought. The boundaries between the two shade off by almost imperceptible gradations; and the dramatist would often have seemed to work under a double inspiration. Thus there are certainly elements which it is difficult not to recognise as romantic in the tragic drama of the Greeks, to a yet greater extent in that of the Italians and the French. On the other hand, it is impossible to deny the influence of the classical type upon the Elizabethans, particularly upon the essentially romantic genius of Marlowe. Nor, with all his efforts, did Hugo ever succeed in shaking entirely free from the classical tradition which circumstances had riveted upon the tragic drama of France.

It will be observed that no provision is here made for certain recent developments of the drama; in particular for the "realistic" tragedy which we are apt—not, as we shall see, altogether justly—to associate with the name of Ibsen. The truth is that we have here an entirely new departure, and one the ultimate consequences of which

it is impossible to foresee. Accordingly, in the limited time at our disposal, I have thought it best to confine myself, in this matter, to Ibsen. In the course of the present lecture, and again at the end of our survey, I shall have occasion to speak of his work, and to indicate the relation in which I believe it to stand to the main line which tragic drama has hitherto followed in its growth.

From what has already been said it will be clear that, in my view, the general trend of that development has been from the classical to the romantic type. And I do not think that this will be seriously disputed. Returns upon the classical model there have doubtless been. The whole history of the drama in France and Italy bears witness to the fact. So does the classical revival promoted by Goethe and Schiller. But that the general line of advance has been what I say, there is, I think, no doubt whatever. What then, it will be asked, are the essential characteristics of our two main types, and wherein is the fundamental distinction to be found?

It is sometimes said that the essential quality of the romantic drama is to follow nature; and that the essence of the advance, which we are here to consider, is to have been a progress from the artificial to the natural, from the conventional to the real. In this notion there is a grain of truth. But it is misleading in itself; misleading as a

description alike of the classical and the romantic drama. And it is still more misleading in its obvious implication. That implication, it need hardly be said, is that the true function of the drama is to "copy nature," to "hold up the mirror to nature," to reproduce human life exactly as it is. This, however, is hardly the function of art in any shape. It has certainly not been the function of the drama, as understood by its greatest masters.

For what are the facts? Consider, firstly, the more formal aspect of the case. In respect of the classical drama it is really not worth arguing. No one could assert that either Æschylus or Racine even attempted to reflect life as it is. But do we fare much better with the romantic dramatist? Even he is unable to paint life as a whole. Like all other artists, he is forced, by the purely material conditions of his task if by nothing else, to select. And the moment selection begins, the attempt to reproduce the object before him as a whole, to give an absolutely faithful copy of it, necessarily ceases. Again, if he gets rid of such conventions as the unities, it is only to set up other conventions of his own; the convention, for instance, that the imagination of the spectator shall leap from place to place, from time to time, at the bidding of scenery which every one knows to be a deception, or a stage-direction which he is commonly left to

gather from the circumstances that follow. In the romantic no less than in the classical drama the whole performance is a tissue of conventions: conventions which we all instinctively make, but which are none the less conventions because we are hardly conscious of having made them.

Once more. Consider the soliloquies of the romantic drama, above all of the tragedies of Shakespeare. If we were asked to point to the passages of *Hamlet* or *Macbeth* which are the most significant, which let us the most deeply into the secret of the hero's character, and enable us the most surely to "pluck out the heart of his mystery," we should at once lay our finger on the great soliloquies. There is no part of these masterpieces which we would not surrender more willingly than these. And the same applies to the soliloquies of Marlowe's *Faustus* and of *Faust*. Yet where could a more glaring convention be found than the soliloquy? Who ever heard of a man in real life folding his arms and discoursing glorious poetry to his own shadow? Lastly, consider the deep significance of that poetic speech for which we instinctively look in any tragedy which we approach with high expectations, and seldom look in vain. The poetic form, we feel, is well-nigh of the essence of the deepest tragedy. Without it, the very spirit would be lost or maimed. But, once more, where

can we find a more manifest convention? And does it not hold good as strongly with the romantic as with the classical drama? The prose scenes interspersed in Shakespeare or *Faust* only prove, what no one will deny, that the romantic drama is more elastic in this matter than the classical. And the few notable tragedies written wholly in prose are after all, exceptions which prove the rule rather than confute it; while the most notable of them all, *Emilia Galotti*, partakes at least as much of the classical as of the romantic type. The poetic form then, we may say, is almost, if not quite, essential to the highest tragedy. It has been adopted almost, if not quite, as completely by the romantic as by the classical dramatists. Yet, like all the other points here indicated, it is a pure convention. Like all the rest, it betrays that the real aim of the dramatist is not to copy nature but to transform her, not to obey her but to use her for imaginative ends.

The same thing appears still more clearly when we turn from the form to the spirit of the romantic drama. If we approach *Faust* or *Hamlet* with the determination to find in them no more than a reflection of life as we know it, we shall make no more of them than we should make of *Antigone* or the *Eumenides* under the same conditions. More of life, more of experience, is doubtless taken up into the modern examples, and herein lies their greatness.

Not, however, in the bare fact that the material is more complete, more widely gathered, more close to life as we find it; but that, being all this, it is fused as completely by the imagination of the dramatist, it appeals as deeply to the imagination of the spectator or reader, as the more jealously sifted, the more obviously idealised, material of the ancients.

Indeed, from one point of view we may truly say that the modern drama, so far from being less, is yet more, ideal than the ancient. The life which the moderns have scrutinised more closely, the experience from which they have drawn more widely, is after all not that which lies without us, not that which meets the eye, even of the keenest observer, in man's outward circumstances and conditions. It is the inner life, the world not of outward fact, nor even of outward action, but of the inmost thoughts, feelings, instincts, and passions of mankind. What distinguishes the modern from the ancient drama above all other things is its greater inwardness. And that, when we come to think of it, is only another way of saying that it is more ideal. Let any one read *Faust* or *Hamlet*, above all let him read those supreme passages which embody the very heart and soul of their intention, let him compare them with the greatest plays and the supreme passages of Æschylus or Sophocles; and let him deny the truth of this assertion, if he can.

From all this it results that the true function of the drama, romantic as well as classical, is not to reproduce nature but to idealise it; and that in some ways, and those not the least important, the modern drama does so more completely, in a sense yet more pregnant, than the ancient. And may not the same thing be said of art in general, of all the forms in which the imaginative instinct can take shape? Is it not as true of painting or sculpture as it is of poetry or the drama? So far as form goes, the truth is here still more apparent. Rob a picture of its distribution of light and shade, of the subtle harmonies of its scheme of colours; rob a statue of its proportion and its grace; rob them, in short, of all that is *not* in nature, and you will have no picture, and no statue, left. The result may be much more "like life," like the crude object presented by nature. But it will have ceased to be a work of art, it will have ceased to have any charm; and the first glance will satisfy us that this is so. In the same way with what we loosely call the spirit. The true artist is not he who is content with the mere outward form, however beautiful. It is he who by subtle touches makes us feel the pulse of life within. The supreme artist is not he who reproduces the commonplace and the trivial; but he who gives bodily form to the noblest capacities of man, to the "thought which wanders through

eternity," to the will which breaks its way through every obstacle, to the love which triumphs over death. And that, through different channels, in a different matter and with other instruments, is the function also of the dramatist.

Let us take a few instances by way of illustration. Compare, firstly, the *Madonna della Seggia* with two other pictures by the same artist; the *Madonna di San Sisto* and the *Madonna del Granduca.* All three deal ostensibly with the same subject. All three are painted with the same consummate art. But it will be felt at once that between the first and the two others there is the widest possible difference. The one paints a purely human love, the love of the earthly mother for her first-born. One would say that Raphael had deliberately done everything in his power to bind us to the earth, to make us forget who the mother was, and who the child, to confine us within the bounds of a purely human pathos. How different is it with the two other pictures! Here the human love is assuredly not lost. But by a hundred touches, which perhaps no critic could define, it is lifted into the yet higher and purer love which clasps all heaven and earth within its arms, which surrenders life and heaven itself to save the wandering and the lost. Will any one deny that this is the impression left by each of these

two pictures as a whole? Will any one deny that it is something different in kind from the effect, glorious as it is, wrought by the peasant mother and the peasant babe of the companion picture? And will any one doubt which of the two effects is the higher?

An example from sculpture is more perilous. For there are many who hold the statuary to be bound fast within the world of outward beauty; who consider that, the moment he ventures himself in the world of spirit, he is lost. There are others, however, who refuse to recognise the validity of such restrictions. And for them the following comparison—a comparison which refers to a distinction different from, though kindred with, the foregoing—may have weight. Compare, then, two statues by the greatest of modern sculptors; the *Adone* and the *Creposcolo*, both from the hand of Michael Angelo. The contrast here is not, as in the preceding case, between the actual and the ideal—for both statues are highly idealised—but between two different types of the ideal; between that which limits itself to the portrayal of outward beauty and that which aims at giving bodily form to the world of spirit and of soul. If we look only at the pose of the two figures, we may find a superficial resemblance. There is something of the same droop of the limbs; the droop of death in the one case, of sleep, or the

first reluctant awakening from sleep, in the other. But the resemblance is quite forgotten in the contrast. The one gives us the perfection of bodily beauty; a beauty so calm and self-contained that even death is powerless to trouble it; so marvellous that, in defiance of death, it seems to hold the hearts of all men at its will. The other, the woman, has less of grace, and the spirit of calm has gone from her for ever. The weariness of the world has taken possession of her soul. It breathes from every limb and looks out, in sorrow and agony, from her brow and from her eyes. Her true life is not in the present, but in the past and the future, in the torture of memory and the forebodings of despair, in the ideal vision before which all actual achievement seems a mockery or an outrage. The body, beautiful as it is, has become the mere instrument of the spirit. Her physical beauty is necessarily less; for it is purposely subordinated to the nobility of the soul which broods and suffers within. But in that spiritual life there is an intensity which more than compensates for the loss of outward grace, for the sacrifice of that exquisite poise of all the faculties which is stamped on the face and on every limb of the other. The one has the serenity of infinite beauty, the other the unrest of

> Infinite passion, and the pain
> Of finite hearts that yearn.

Once again, can we doubt that in the latter the artist has attempted both a harder and a higher task? or that his boldness is more than justified by the result?

Let our last example be taken from literature; let us compare the *Antigone* of Sophocles with a striking modern play, *An Enemy of the People.* The theme of both, if for the moment we make abstraction of everything that gives form and colour and distinctive character to a work of art, is virtually the same; the revolt of the individual conscience against the community and its tyranny. Each, according to its own scheme, is most skilfully constructed. But in the methods they follow, in the effect they produce, the two are poles asunder. In the modern play everything is done to throw stress upon the outward circumstances, the squalor of the social surroundings, against which the individual rebels. The petty intrigues of the mushroom watering-place, its greed, its spite, its scandal, its very drains, are brought bodily upon the stage; and it is the essence of Ibsen's method that they should be. In the same way the figure of the hero, the rebel doctor, is painted with the utmost minuteness of surrounding detail. Moreover, we are at once struck with something peculiar in the light under which he is presented. His cause is good and, under the given conditions, it is driven home to our imagination with uncommon power. But, at the end of the account, the cause is

almost lost in the man, in the delight with which he clasps the opportunity of revolt, in the exulting assertion of his own naked individuality. No one will deny that this is true to life, nor that the result, in its own way, is strikingly dramatic. No one will wish the play written otherwise than it is. For when the end attained is so impressive, it is absurd to quarrel with the means of its attainment.

Yet, if we compare Ibsen's play with that of Sophocles, we can hardly fail to recognise that the latter moves throughout upon a higher plane, that alike in conception and handling it is a nobler achievement. The circumstances are more inspiring in themselves, and they are not obtruded on us with the detail which, in the modern play, goes far to stun and deaden the imagination. What is yet more significant, we are made to feel, from the first scene to the last, that the weightiest issues are at stake, that the individual characters, Creon and Antigone, have their feet planted on the rock, that they draw their strength and their very being from the causes for which they stand, and that those causes are the greatest for which man can shed his blood, or the human will imperil all that it holds dear. The one stands for human justice, the other for divine; the one for the law of the land, the other for the eternal rights which are the same in one city as in another. Each of the conflicting

faiths has its justification, each is founded on principles which are essential to the well-being of mankind. It is an evil day for men when the bands of human justice prove themselves too narrow, when they have to be torn asunder and the individual is left with nothing but his own conscience, his innate sense of equity, to guide his dealings with his fellowmen. But such days have come, and will continue to come until the end of the world. And when they do come, there is nothing for it but that the individual should take his conscience in his hand and appeal from the injustice of that which is seen to the justice of that which is unseen and abides.

So in the play before us. Both characters alike have faith in their own cause; both, in some sense, appeal to right; Creon to the concrete, traditional right of man, Antigone to the invisible, eternal right which dwells with God. Between the two there is no possibility of reconciliation. They close, as it is inevitable they should close, in mortal conflict. That which is humanly the weaker is, in the human sense, crushed and ground to powder. But in its very defeat it has found victory. And the conqueror himself bows in utter abasement before the divine law which he had obstinately defied. Surely it must be admitted that we move here in a purer atmosphere, that we are brought face to face with a more spiritual and a nobler world than that

of the self-centred, self-asserting characters of *An Enemy of the People*. Once more, the region of the highest poetry is not the outward but the inward; its function is not to reproduce but to idealise; its noblest task is to idealise, not the lower, but the higher side of our nature. And the man who can do this with the supreme genius of Sophocles is not only the nobler spirit, but the greater artist.

The above examples are purposely drawn from different fields, and they illustrate different sides of the truth which it concerns us to enforce. It is perhaps well to add a warning. To idealise is doubtless the highest task of the dramatist. But let it not be supposed that such idealisation is to be attained solely, or chiefly, by exclusion. Let us not demand of the dramatic poet, as some have done, that he shall turn his back on the fret and stir of earthly passion, upon the conditions and struggles of man's life, as we know it. It is a false and narrow idealism which turns to such shifts as these. It may easily cease to be idealism at all. It may become a majestic pageant, it may become a tale full of sound and fury, in either case "signifying nothing." Such is not the idealism of Æschylus and Sophocles; still less is it that of Shakespeare. The last and highest work of the dramatist is to idealise. But idealisation presupposes something to idealise; a matter which becomes ideal, which

receives a new form, which is inspired by a new spirit at the plastic touch of the poet's imagination. And if the object of the poet, as has been said, be to interpret life, then the more of that matter he can bring within his magic circle, the more completely has he succeeded; the more ideal, the more truly imaginative, is his genius. Hence the strength of the romantic, the unrivalled strength of the Shakespearean, drama.

And this brings us to the dominant thought on which these Lectures are based, to the point round which the remainder of the course will largely turn. The more we study the history of the drama, the stronger in all probability will be our conviction that the general line of development has been from exclusion to inclusion, from a less to a more complete idealisation of the material offered by human life, from a narrower to a wider rendering of all that the heart of man presents to our observation. And if we ask, What is the precise road which this course of development has followed?—the answer is: it has been, on the whole, a change from the presentation of action to the presentation of character, a gradual shifting of the scene from that which is without to that which is within. And so it is that the romantic drama is, taken all in all, at once wider and deeper than the classical. Wider, in that it comprehends more of the actual experience of life, more of the actual "stuff of the conscience" and the heart;

deeper, in that it has sought this fresh matter not from without, but from within; not in the mere surroundings and outward trappings of man's existence, but in his most secret passions, thoughts, feelings, and aspirations. Consider the whole scope and spirit of Shakespeare's tragedies; consider above all the great soliloquies of *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*; consider *Faust* or the plays of Browning; and we shall at once recognise that this is the case. Nor is it easy to deny that we have here a gain, an enormous gain, to the main end and purpose of the drama; which is to represent, and in representing, to interpret and idealise life.

At the same time, it is right to acknowledge that this gain carried with it, inevitably carried with it, a corresponding loss. Extend the scope of the drama, enlarge it so as to take in a wider stretch of life, deepen it so as to include the ultimate springs of action and character; and it is impossible that the issue should be so sharply defined, the characters so clear-cut, the action so closely serried, the situation so simple, pointed, and compact—the form, generally speaking, so finely chiselled—as in the classical drama where all these conditions are reversed. To secure that "statuesqueness" of form, which, as De Quincey said, is the essence of the greatest classical dramas, a certain amount of exclusion, of limitation, is indispensable. And that exclusion, that limitation, it is of the essence of the romantic drama to overthrow.

LECTURE II

GREEK TRAGEDY: ÆSCHYLUS

I SAID in the last lecture that the Greek drama was, in my opinion, unrivalled in respect of form. Let us begin by trying to call before our imagination the spectacle which a Greek tragedy actually presented. It is something so utterly different from anything we have seen, or shall ever see, that a considerable effort is required. Imagine the brilliant sky of Greece. Imagine a vast concourse, thirty thousand,[1] men and women,[2] assembled beneath it, to watch, not a horse-race, not a football match, but a presentment of the mightiest forces that can rule the will of man, gathered in mortal struggle for the possession of his soul. Imagine this mental conflict set forth with all the charm that majestic language and music, the noblest spectacular effect, the deepest associations of

[1] See Plato, *Symposium*, p. 175. The reference is to one of the tragedies of Agathon, a considerably younger contemporary of Euripides. All his works have unfortunately perished. The possible number of spectators is by some put at 15,000.

[2] It may be remarked that there is some doubt as to the admission of women. On the whole, however, the evidence seems to be in favour of the statement in the text.

religion have the power to give. Imagine the multitude ranged, tier above tier, round three-quarters of a vast circle; the eyes of all fixed upon a stage far ampler than any we have seen, and beneath it an altar round which the Chorus either stands, or moves in stately measures, doing honour to Dionysus, the god of inspired dance and song and action, taking part in the dramatic movement of the tragedy, invoking divine and human justice upon the deeds and words of those whose destinies are at stake before their eyes. Imagine all this, and we have some faint reflection, but only a reflection, of what the tragic drama was to Greece.[1]

Suppose the tragedy to be the *Eumenides*, the last[2] of the dramas of Æschylus which have come down to us—the last and perhaps the greatest. The background of the stage in the opening scene is the most sacred spot in the whole world of the Hellenic race, the temple of Apollo at Delphi. The priestess of the god appears, and, in a few solemn words, rehearses the sacredness of her mission. Then she passes within the temple doors, to consult the will of the god, to seek guidance for those who come on pilgrimage to his shrine. For a few minutes the stage is empty. Then the priestess staggers back

[1] The above may serve as a *general* description of the Greek tragic stage. There are several exceptions, and the *Eumenides* is one.

[2] It was, of course, produced at the same time (458 B.C.) as the two earlier sections of the *Oresteia*, of which it forms the conclusion.

into the light of day, her face blanched with terror, her knees failing beneath her with horror of the sight she has seen within. The scene opens, and the inside of the temple is revealed to view. There, cowering at the altar, his hands still red with blood, lies a hunted criminal: Orestes, who to avenge his father's murder had lifted the sword against his guilty mother. Round the fugitive crouches a ghastly, inhuman band —the avenging spirits, the Furies; their skin black and wrinkled, their eyes oozing, their very breath defiled, with the blood of the victims they have hunted to their doom. An uneasy sleep has fallen upon them, wearied out for the moment by the heat of the chase. But even in sleep they seem still to be pursuing their victim and to be panting for his blood. Above the criminal stands the god of the temple, with one arm stretched out to warn the bloodhounds off, the other to give protection and courage to their prey. "It is true," he says, "that thou hast slain thy mother. But it was I who bade thee do it. Take heart therefore, and know that I am with thee and will not forsake thee. Fly over sea and land; and though the hell-hounds are on thy track, be sure that after weary wanderings thou shalt reach Athens at last; there the goddess, my sister, shall throw her shield over thee, there thy cause shall be brought to solemn trial, and thou shalt be freed from thy pursuers." At these words Orestes rises and is guided

by the god Hermes from the temple. Apollo alone remains, and the Furies, still couched in sleep upon the ground.[1] The next moment the spirit of Clytemnestra, the murdered mother, appears to reproach them with the flight of the murderer, and to goad them on his track. Like sleeping hounds they whine and groan at the visions with which she troubles their slumber. At length they start up and demand how the fugitive has been able to "leap over the net." The god hurls scorn and wrath upon them, and a bitter altercation follows. Then, with cries of rage, they depart in pursuit of their prey.

The scene changes to Athens, to the temple of Athene. Once more Orestes is seen kneeling at the shrine, and clasping the image of the goddess in his arms. But the hell-hounds are still hard upon his track; and forthwith they sweep in, as "dogs close round upon the wounded fawn." Orestes does not lose heart. He cries aloud on the goddess to come to his aid; he shows his pursuers that the blood of murder is already faded from his hand. The Furies answer with words of assured defiance. They warn him that he is the victim fatted and devoted to their

[1] So, I suppose, it is generally taken; so it was certainly in the fine performance at Cambridge (December 1906). I cannot, however, convince myself that Apollo remains in the temple during the appearance of Clytemnestra. Is it not more impressive if we suppose him to depart after his last words to Orestes (l. 93), and to return to drive the Furies forth (l. 179)? The abruptness of the opening of the latter speech, together with other considerations, inclines me to this view.

vengeance; they break out into a solemn hymn, denouncing the enormity of the deed, and the fatal blow dealt at all human justice if it should be pardoned. As the accusing chant closes, the goddess appears. She hears what the accusers have to say, and what the accused. "No one man," she replies, "nor any god, may rightly judge this suit. Let the trumpet sound, let the elders of the land be summoned, and, under my guidance, let the way of justice be laid down for all time." Once more the scene changes: this time to the sacred hill beyond the walls of Athens, the hill where centuries later Saint Paul was to plead the gospel of love and mercy before the descendants of those who first listened to this drama. The elders assemble; the jury is empanelled; Apollo appears to plead the cause of the accused; the votes are cast into the urn, the goddess herself casting the last vote, and casting it for acquittal. The votes on either side are equal, and Orestes—narrowly, but none the less surely—is freed from guilt. It remains to soften the wrath of the avengers and to stay their resentment. Athene offers them an honoured home in the city that she loves. Their sternness is at length melted, their pride relents; and, after pronouncing a solemn blessing on the land, they are led forth with rejoicings to their promised abode. The doom of the house of Atreus is at last rolled away. But the avenging spirits remain to keep watch and

ward over human life, and to exact eternal reckoning for bloodshed.

The first thing to strike us in this is the extraordinary command of dramatic effect to which it bears witness. The next is the deeply religious spirit which pervades the whole drama. And this is to the last degree important; for during the palmy days of Greek tragedy, throughout the work of Æschylus and Sophocles, it remained an invariable characteristic, and none is more significant. With the Greeks, indeed, tragedy in its first beginnings had been nothing more nor less than a solemn act of religious worship; and though other elements were afterwards introduced—elements which, at first sight, might seem to throw these primitive origins into the shade—it retained the essentially religious character till the end; or rather, till Euripides, among many other changes, went far to change this also in the form which he inherited from his predecessors. And unless we bear this in mind, the greatest achievements of the Greek drama will remain a sealed book to us for ever.

But, it may be said, what has an act of religious worship to do with the drama? Is it not the essence of the drama to give us a picture of human life? And how can that enter into an act of religious worship? This is perfectly true; and, in the beginning, the performances of the Greek stage were, in truth,

entirely undramatic. In the first instance, it would seem, there were no actors at all. The Chorus supplied the only personages of the piece; and the Chorus acted, in the strictest sense, as a collective body, whose function was to sing hymns—hymns, it is quite possible, often woven around the tale of some mythical or national hero[1]—in honour of Dionysus. It is manifest that we have here nothing that can fairly be called drama. The first step away from this purely ritual performance was taken, as some critics suppose, when one member of the Chorus, the leader perhaps, was detached from the rest and a kind of antiphone instituted between him and them. Such was, or may have been, the beginning of dialogue. Before any extant drama was composed, a second step had already been taken. There was now one perfectly distinct and separate actor upon the stage, and he carried on a formal and regular dialogue with the Chorus; the Chorus, on its side, taking a more specific, a more equal—one might almost say, a more dramatic—part in action than was subsequently the case. This was the phase in which the drama came into the hands of Æschylus. And in one of his plays at least—the *Supplices*, which in spirit is altogether the most primitive that has come down to us—this is, in fact, the plan adopted throughout the greater part of the piece. And it is significant that

[1] Such an ode is to be found in *Antigone*, ll. 944-87.

in this play the Chorus is still the chief, as it was once the sole, bearer of the action; the "protagonist," the leading actor, to adopt the term applied by the Greeks themselves. The next step in advance was to add a second actor; and this step, as we know on the authority of Aristotle, was taken by Æschylus. Yet a third was added by Sophocles, and the reform was adopted by Æschylus in his later plays. The general effect of all these changes was to depose the Chorus from the first place to the second; in the emphatic phrase of Aristotle, to "make the dialogue the protagonist"; in one word, to create the drama.[1]

Yet the drama, so created, was something very different from ours. To us the first, though by no means the only, thing suggested by the word is the portrayal of character. To the Greeks character, as distinguished from action, plot, situation, always remained a subordinate—though, it need hardly be said, a highly important—element. It enters only in so far as it bears directly upon the main action. It counts, to use the phrase of Aristotle, only in so far as "carried in the train of action." The action, the plot, is, in the words of the same great critic, "the vital principle, the very soul, of the drama." And if we limit his words to the Greek drama—which, it

[1] The above is the commonly accepted account, and it is mainly based on Aristotle. Statements which either are, or appear to be, in contradiction with it are made by other ancient writers; and the whole subject is full of difficulties. See Lessing, *Leben des Sophokles*, Note L.

need hardly be said, was the only one present to his mind—this is emphatically true. It may be admitted, as modern critics have pointed out, that, by the term "action" or "plot," Aristotle intended to cover more than we perhaps should be apt to do. "The specific quality," he says in another place, "is given to the action by the characters." But, after all allowance has been made for this, it remains true that he does explicitly distinguish "action" from "character," to the disadvantage, if we may say so, of the latter. It remains true that, alike in theory and in practice, the Greek drama was primarily a drama of action, of plot, of situation; that it was only in a secondary degree a drama of character. And this is above all the case with the tragedies of Æschylus.

Of the three terms which I have just applied to the general scope and nature of the Greek drama, "situation" is that which is most germane to the plays of Æschylus. I incline to think he was the greatest master of dramatic situation that has ever arisen. And, as this has not merely a personal but a general bearing, as it marks an important stage in the whole development of the drama, it is perhaps well to pause for a moment in order to consider what is the precise meaning which we attach to this and to the two other terms in question. Action, situation, plot—this would seem, at any rate, from one point of view, to form an ascending scale of intensity in

regard to the spectacle presented by the stage, and the handling of the elements which unite to make it. Action as such, in the sense of incident, may be regarded as the simplest, the most rudimentary, form of the drama. It may exist without situation and without plot. It does so exist in the *Tamburlaine* of Marlowe and in some of the historical plays of Shakespeare, above all in the First Part of *Henry VI.* And so divorced from situation and plot, it is manifest that action can yield only an extremely imperfect form of drama. A play so constructed may be made up of incidents quite detached and disconnected from each other. It may have little or no unity. It lacks that "beginning, middle, and end" which Aristotle rightly declared to be essential to the drama, in any true or high sense of the term. Now it is remarkable that the Greek drama, as it has come down to us, presents no example of a play constructed in this fashion. And it is possible that the innate artistic sense of the Greeks may have saved them altogether from what is obviously so great an error. It is highly significant that this should have been the besetting sin not of the classical, but of the romantic drama. And in the romantic drama it may fairly be regarded as a revolt—an instinctive and largely unconscious revolt—against the comparative lack of action, understood as incident, in the drama of the ancients and in the neo-classical drama which was based upon it.

The next step in our scale is to be found in dramatic situation. Of action, in the wider sense—and even in the narrower sense of incident—a certain amount is here necessarily involved. Without incident—past, present, or imminent—no such thing as situation is conceivable. But it is important to notice that, in this connection, action has already lost its absolute and independent meaning. It is no longer pure incident. It is incident directed to a certain definite end, grouped in a certain definite manner, charged with a certain definite significance. It has dropped its abstract and isolated existence. It has been taken up into a higher principle, the principle of a given artistic unity, a given imaginative effect. Now when that effect is perfectly simple, when it admits of being crystallised round a single point and presented, as it were, at a single glance, we commonly speak of it as a situation. Such is the group of events—or, if we prefer to say so, of events and persons—presented by the fourth act of the *Merchant of Venice*, by the culminating scene of any tragedy—or, for that matter, of almost any comedy—that we like to name.

The plot, finally, may be described as a succession of situations—or, in some cases, as a larger, more comprehensive, succession of events—all bearing on the same point, all directed to the same end, all combining, therefore, all as we say "working up,"

to produce an imaginative effect which the spectator recognises as forming an organic, an articulated whole. The plot is, on this showing, nothing more than an extension of the same principle which had already given rise to the situation. It is, so to speak, the situation enlarged so as to embrace the whole action of the play; the situation regarded as diffused throughout the whole play, from beginning to end. And it is of action in this sense, of action as identical with plot, that Aristotle habitually speaks.

There is little difficulty in applying these remarks to the plays of Æschylus in particular. Of action in the primitive sense of the term, of action as equivalent to incident, there is often little or nothing in his tragedies. That is true of the *Supplices*; it is still more true of *Prometheus* and the *Persae*. Of the two latter pieces it may fairly be said that nothing happens from beginning to end. Prometheus is clamped to the rock in the opening scene; a storm breaks on him at the close; and that is all. A messenger brings to the Persian capital the tidings of Salamis and Platæa; the spirit of Darius rises to lament over the disaster; Xerxes himself returns; and that again is all. Nothing could be more simple; nothing, some critics will tell you, could be more childish. These plays, in truth, are destitute not only of incident but of plot. There is a succession of stately scenes, each of which, under a fresh light,

drives home the same imaginative effect; and there is nothing more. Even in the great trilogy—that of which the *Eumenides* forms the closing act—though here it will at once be felt that we have a far more distinctively dramatic effect, there is comparatively little of incident or of plot. Certainly, the plot is put together far more loosely, it is far less serried and compact, than is the case with the masterpieces of Sophocles—*Antigone*, for instance, or *Œdipus Tyrannus*. It was probably this consideration which led Goethe to say that many of the plays of Æschylus —he must have been thinking in particular of the *Supplices* and the *Persae*—are, so far as structure goes, in the nature of ballads.[1] It is an illuminating criticism; and a comparison between the *Persae* and *Chevy Chase* would hold good in more than one direction.

The plays of Æschylus, then, are sparing of incident; they are of extreme simplicity in plot. And it may be asked: What in respect of distinctively dramatic quality, what apart from their glorious poetry, is left for them to claim? The answer is that, almost without exception, they are masterpieces of dramatic situation. Where, indeed, in this respect, shall we find his equal among dramatists? Where can we point to situations so simple, so majestic, so overpowering in their appeal to the heart and the

[1] See Goethe's *Gespräche* (Ed. Biedermann), i. 287.

imagination? It is to the last degree significant that the earliest dramatist whose works have come down to us should have excelled above all in that which—incident pure and simple being set aside for the reasons just assigned—is the most elementary form of the dramatic instinct, which may fairly be said to contain within itself the germ of the whole subsequent development of the drama. Let us take a few illustrations from the best known and greatest of his tragedies.

And first, consider the situation in *Prometheus*. Imagine the scene among the cliffs and chasms of the Caucasus. Prometheus, the god who has befriended man and raised him from weakness and desolation, is dragged in by two brutal ruffians, Force and Might. With every kind of torture they clamp him to the rocks, at the bidding of the highest god, Zeus, the jealous tyrant whose will is law, "whom reason hath equalled, whom force," at least for the moment, "hath made supreme above his equals." So long as the tormentors are present, the sufferer disdains to open his lips. No sooner are they departed than he breaks out into a cry of indignant protest—Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth!—against the enormity of his wrongs. The rest of the play is one long cry of defiance against an unjust god, of pity for mankind so cruelly oppressed. And at the close of the drama, when as a penalty for his firmness his

tortures are redoubled, when the storm bursts in thunder and lightning on his head, we see his will still unbroken, his courage still undaunted, we still hear him denouncing the injustice of his doom. Could any situation be more simple? Could any be more stirring in itself, or presented amid surroundings more striking to the eye and the imagination?

Or turn to the last and most dramatic of the poet's works — the trilogy, the threefold drama, known as the *Oresteia*, the Doom of the house of Atreus. The subject of the first part is the murder of Agamemnon by his wife and her paramour; of the second, the vengeance taken, after years of waiting, by Orestes; of the third, the hounding of Orestes by the avenging spirits of his mother, and his final purging at the judgment-seat of God and man. Each of the three parts is crystallised in a supreme situation — in one case, a series of situations—as simple as it is impressive. What, for instance, could be more striking than the central scene of the first part, *Agamemnon*? The king, returning triumphant from the sack of Troy, is led by his false wife within the fatal doors of the palace. His captive, Cassandra, remains without. As she waits, the spirit of prophecy comes over her; the darkness is lifted from her eyes; she beholds in rapt vision the deeds of horror which have brought a curse upon the house of Atreus in the

past; she foresees the no less accursed deed which treachery is preparing against the returned warrior at that moment. Even while she speaks, while the Chorus listens horror-stricken to her inspired utterance, the cry of the murdered king is heard from within. Clytemnestra sweeps forth, to glory in the deed. Cassandra herself is led within, to share her captor's doom. Once more the situation is seized and presented with unequalled mastery of all the effects of horror. And this is the more notable when we remember that the situation in question embodies what is, in truth, the sole incident of the piece; that all which has gone before is cunningly designed to lead up to it, and all which follows to drive home and enhance its imaginative effect.

In the same way with the *Choephoroe*, the second drama of the series, though here the situations are multiplied, and a nearer approach to a sustained plot is clearly to be detected. Roughly, it may be said that the play condenses itself in three successive situations. In the first of these, the brother and sister nerve themselves for the hideous deed which lies before them by a passionate recital of their father's murder, of the ghastly circumstances which surrounded it, and of the cruel wrongs inflicted on themselves. In the second, the vengeance is carried out, first on the wretched accomplice, then, after a heartrending plea for pity—a plea which for one

moment shakes even the grim purpose of Orestes —upon Clytemnestra, the chief criminal, herself. Lastly, while Orestes displays the blood-stained implements of his father's murder, as though to justify his appalling act, the avenging spirits of his mother, the ghastly figures of the Furies, seem to appear already closing round their victim. His very reason becomes darkened. But before the night falls utterly upon his soul, he calls God and man to witness that all has been done in justice, and hurries from the slaughter-house to seek sanctuary at the shrine of Apollo.

Here we have no less than three situations, each of which springs naturally from the subject, while all are bound together by the closest possible connection. And if any one chose to maintain that there is a fourth, the recognition between brother and sister at the opening of the play, he would be well within his rights. It is plain, therefore, that we have here a memorable example of skill in the weaving of a plot; the more memorable, when we consider how little power in this matter is displayed in the earlier tragedies of Æschylus, and how little guidance, if we except the possible influence of his younger rival, Sophocles, he can have had from the work of others. Even here, however, it remains true that each situation taken singly is still more notable than the plot, regarded as a whole. The

two closing scenes in particular—the tragic pleading between Orestes and his doomed mother, his swift revulsion to despair directly the doom has been enforced—have, as situations, never been surpassed. In dramatic intensity, in instinctive knowledge of the inmost windings of man's heart, they stand alone. Of the third play, the *Eumenides*, it is unnecessary to speak. The sketch of it given at the beginning of this lecture will suffice to show that in this, his latest play, the hand of Æschylus had in no wise lost its cunning.

But what of the remaining element which all admit to be necessary to the completion of the drama, the element which Aristotle unceremoniously thrust into the second place, but which modern writers, alike in theory and in practice, have eagerly promoted to the first, the element of character? Even if the Greeks had had no prepossessions on this subject—and from the remarks of Aristotle it is quite clear that they had—at this early stage of the drama it would be idle to look for any great subtlety in the handling of the *dramatis personae*. Nor is it easy to see how anything of this kind would have fitted into the stately structure of Greek tragedy, into the almost unearthly grandeur of its ideals, into the peculiar outward conditions under which it was set forth. Confining ourselves to the last point—not because it is the most important,

but because it is the easiest to grasp—we may readily understand that the mere necessity of declaiming to so vast an audience, and declaiming through a mask, at once robbed the actor of those modulations of the voice, of that ceaseless play of feature, which are perhaps the chief resource of the modern stage, and without which it is impossible to render the subtler workings, the more shifting emotions, of the soul within. For this and other reasons we find the Greek dramatists, in particular the two earlier and greater ones, content to give types rather than individuals, to paint the characters of men rather in their broad outlines and their most essential features than in that finer detail, that rapid interchange of light and shade, which is the ambition of the modern dramatist and the supreme achievement of Shakespeare. And this is still more true of Æschylus than of Sophocles.

The characters of Æschylus are drawn with a bold sweep. They stand out sharply from the stormy background of the situation and the action. Prometheus and Clytemnestra, Eteocles and Orestes, Electra and Antigone—all these are sketched with the fewest possible strokes; but each impresses itself distinctly and indelibly on the imagination. This is perhaps best illustrated from his Antigone, the heroine of the *Seven against Thebes*. She is on the stage only for one short scene, a scene of barely

a hundred lines at the close of the drama. She does not speak more than forty lines. But in that brief space she lays bare the whole secret of her nature — a tenderness passing the tenderness of women on the one hand, a will armed to break down every barrier upon the other. When Sophocles years after took up the theme in his greatest tragedy, he did little more than fill in the portrait which Æschylus had sketched.

Thus much on the methods of Æschylus in general. There are, however, two qualities on which it is necessary to lay stress, and which at first sight appear to tend in opposite directions. On the one side, as has already been indicated, he has, as at the close of the *Choephoroe*, sudden flashes of insight into the deepest recesses of the heart. And it may be observed that here at any rate— nor would it perhaps be easy to produce any other instance of this particular faculty — his inspiration is due less to his mastery of character, as such, than to the extraordinary keenness of his moral vision, his insight into the spiritual forces which bear upon the life of man, as a moral being. On the other side, he has a genius — a genius which in its intensity is perhaps unequalled—for embodying these spiritual, elemental forces in outward, visible shape, for incarnating them in figures of flesh and blood. Prometheus, the supreme embodiment of

defiant will, bent to the purposes of heroic justice, is one instance of this. The Eumenides, an incarnation of the avenging stings of conscience, are another. And if in the former instance Æschylus may be held to find a formidable rival in Milton, in the latter I do not know where to look for any parallel, unless it be in the Mephistopheles of Goethe. So that what has been said of the French Titan may be applied in a still more literal sense to the Greek :—

> For thee man's spirit stood
> Disrobed of flesh and blood,
> And bare the heart of the most secret hours ;
> And to thy hand, more tame
> Than birds in winter, came
> High hopes and unknown, flying forms of powers,
> And from thy table fed, and sang
> Till with the tune men's ears took fire and rang.[1]

Of Æschylus, then, we may say that, apart from his technical contributions to the deepening of the Greek drama — and these alone would suffice to make him a landmark of the first importance—he laid the foundations of plot ; that, within the limits which the Greeks never markedly outstepped, he had a striking command of human character and motive ; that he was unrivalled in his grip of the elemental forces which surround, and largely control, the life of man ; and that, above all, he was a consummate master of situation. To all this it

[1] See Swinburne's poem, *To Victor Hugo.*

must be added that he was a supremely great poet. Turn to the picture of the battle of Salamis in the *Persae*; turn to the appeals and defiance of the injured god in *Prometheus*, to the choric odes of *Agamemnon* and the *Eumenides*, and this will at once be felt. Indeed, with one single exception —an exception which there is no need to specify to an English audience—I should say that, of all dramatists, he is the greatest poet.

LECTURE III

GREEK TRAGEDY: SOPHOCLES

SOPHOCLES wrote in the latter half of the fifth century before Christ, as Æschylus in the former. He built upon the foundations laid by his great precursor. But he carried the work farther, and, what is yet more important, he carried it forward in the direction which, as was said in the first lecture, the drama has, on the whole, followed in its subsequent development. The general trend of his genius, the general effect of his work, was to identify the drama more closely with human life, to incorporate it more completely in the form of human will and human passions than had been done by Æschylus. In the elder dramatist, the great forces which determine man's life are constantly presented as lying outside of, or apart from, man. In Sophocles they are habitually identified with man; they appear only as embodied in his will, his instincts, and his passions. This may be illustrated by a comparison between

Prometheus or the *Oresteia* on the one hand and *Antigone* or *Œdipus Tyrannus*, the two greatest achievements of Sophocles, upon the other.

In *Prometheus*, it need hardly be said, the hero is a god. He meets the supreme god on equal terms, dares him to do the worst, and, though vanquished, looks forward with assurance to ultimate victory. His will is a more than human will. He belongs to mankind, not by nature but by sympathy and love. The whole play is based on this assumption. As man, Prometheus would to the Greek mind have been an object not of admiration but of horror, we might almost say repulsion. A reference to the story of Capaneus in the *Seven against Thebes* and other plays, to the *Œdipus* of Sophocles, to the *Bacchae* of Euripides, is enough to establish this. It is only as god that such a character could be hero of a play which is obviously designed to enlist our sympathies on his side. Now, so far as we know, Sophocles never dealt with a theme belonging to mythology, pure and simple; he never took a god for the principal figure of a drama. On the other hand, besides *Prometheus Bound*, there are at least two plays, unfortunately lost, where this seems to have been done by Æschylus.[1] For this

[1] They are *Prometheus Unbound* and *Psychostasia* (*The Weighing of Souls*). Zeus himself seems to have been a principal figure in the latter. See the passages from Plutarch and Pollux, quoted in Dindorf's *Poetae Scenici*, appendix, p. 21. I cannot find anything in the Fragments of Sophocles which suggests a purely

reason we are entitled to say that Sophocles shifted the scene from the world of the gods to the world of men.

Or again, consider the *Oresteia*. Here we have another side of the same tendency, that we have already seen in *Prometheus*. It is no longer the world of the gods to which Æschylus transports us. It is the heart and soul of man. The field of human action is the ground on which we move. And the Furies appear to the fevered vision of Orestes long before they sweep in bodily form upon the stage. Yet, in the end, the anguished vision does take bodily shape; and during the remainder of the drama the avenging spirits are present to the eye, and hurl their denunciations in the ear, of the spectator. The inmost woes of the heart have taken flesh and blood at the bidding of the dramatist. And in reading the play we have not a moment's doubt of their actual, physical existence. What must have been the impression upon those who saw it! Women, we are told, fell down in convulsions at the spectacle, and secret criminals betrayed their guilt by cries of terror and remorse. The unseen forces which sway the soul of man are

mythological subject. *Inachus* would seem to come nearest to this description. Divine beings appear in two of his extant plays; Athene at the beginning of *Ajax*, and Heracles at the end of *Philoctetes*. But, in both cases, the appearance is rather after the manner of Euripides.

[1] See Schiller's stirring poem, *Die Kraniche des Ibykus*.

here made visible not merely to the imagination but to the very sight. So far as I know, there is nothing quite comparable to it in the whole range of literature. There is certainly nothing like it in the plays of Sophocles.

The methods of Sophocles are, indeed, entirely different. Of the spiritual powers which surround and control the life of man he had, doubtless, a sense only less keen than that of Æschylus himself. *Antigone* and the two dramas on Œdipus are sufficient proof of this. But those powers exist for him only as embodied in the will of man, only as interwoven with the very woof and texture of his passions and resolves. Take first *Œdipus Tyrannus*. Here at first sight it might seem as though we were face to face with a drama in which Fate, the unseen power that moves behind and dominates the life of man, was indeed the principal figure. The doom foretold to Œdipus is that he shall slay his father and marry with his mother. And, all unwittingly, he carries out that doom to the very letter. Throughout he has been a puppet in the hands of Fate; so far as purpose and even consciousness are concerned, it is not he but Fate that is the agent. In all this we seem to be confronted with a conception of Fate far cruder, far more external to the will and purpose of man, than anything to be found in Æschylus. But, when we look more closely, we

become aware that this crude, irrational element has little or nothing to do with the present action of the drama; that it enters only into the presuppositions of the action, into the incidents which are indeed necessary to the plot but which are carefully kept out of it; that the whole interest of the play—and it is among the most moving that have ever been written—is centred on the purely human passions, the cruel and tragic situation, to which the discovery of the hideous truth inevitably gives rise. It is not the wanton malice of Fate, it is the passions which follow each other, wave after wave, beating on the heart of Œdipus and finally breaking it in pieces, that form the real subject of this tragedy.[1] So that the very play which, at the first glance, might seem to confute what has been said of the way pursued by Sophocles, proves in the end to support it in a very significant fashion.

An equally clear, but very different, example, may be drawn from *Antigone*. There, as we have seen, the whole substance of the action is contributed by the forces which make the tissue of man's moral life. From beginning to end we are in presence of a mortal conflict between two ideals of justice. Both are sacred; both are essential to the welfare of man and the full development of his powers. The one is

[1] The crucial scene is that between Œdipus and the servant who had been charged by Laius to expose him, ll. 1121-85.

human justice: that justice which bids a man fight for his city or his country, which rightly lays the curse of the traitor upon him who lifts the sword against his fatherland or calls in the aid of the alien to overthrow it. The other justice is yet higher, and it is divine. It is the unwritten justice which rests not on the letter but the spirit; which warns man that the "highest right," when enforced without regard to provocation or circumstance, may become the "deepest wrong"; which above all forbids him to carry his resentments beyond the grave, to inflict a death-wound on the natural promptings of kinship, upon the eternal rights of mankind. But these principles, which in Æschylus might have taken bodily shape, which might have been thrown altogether outside of the world of human action, are by Sophocles embodied in two human wills. And those wills are not mere personifications of abstractions. They are wills touched by human frailties and human shrinkings; wills belonging to beings of like passions with ourselves.

On the one side is the monarch of the injured, and now victorious, city; harsh, narrow, obstinate; but still resting on the right which no man can deny, the right of the State to defend itself against the foreign and the civil sword, to reward its defenders and to punish its foes. On the other side is a lonely,

weak, defenceless girl. She, too, knows the sacredness of the fatherland; she, too, is stirred by love of the hallowed spots she has known from childhood. And one of the most moving touches in the latter part of the play is the longing with which she looks for the last time on the springs and groves where she was nurtured, on the city which has doomed her to death because she does battle for the right.[1] But, when she sees that love of country is used as a cloak for mean revenge, when she sees the divine law trampled under foot in the name of a law which is merely human, then she throws all other thoughts to the winds; she takes her life in her hand; she goes forth with none to help her, or wish her well, or even excuse her;[2] and in defiance of the ruler, in defiance of a public will which blindly bows before his bidding, she performs the last duties to the dead, she buries the brother who had been cast out to the ravens and the kites.

There is here no question of divine intervention, no embodiment of human promptings or terrors in a superhuman shape. It is two human wills thrown into the sharpest conflict with each other, with nothing but the force of circumstance, and the more irresistible force of their own nature and their own

[1] *Antigone*, ll. 838-52.

[2] The chorus—a chorus, too, composed solely of men—throughout blames her for unreason, obstinacy, and presumption. See, in particular, ll. 380-4, 834-7, 853-6, 872-5.

ideals, to drive them on. And, if any further doubt were possible, the dramatist has spared no pains to sweep it aside by the sequel. When the fatal deed has been accomplished, then and not till then is there a return of each stubborn will upon itself. Then and not till then is each visited by the human compunctions, or the human shrinkings, which by a law of our being are apt to follow upon any irrevocable act. Antigone glories in her "holy crime" until the last; and she does well to glory. But with pathetic longing she clings to the life which she had deliberately forfeited. Her eye lingers on the "last gleam of light" which is granted her by the tyrant, and she passes lamenting to her living tomb.[1] In the same way, though necessarily at a later point of the action, with the tyrant, Creon. He, too, is an essentially human figure; human not only in the caprice and obstinacy of the earlier scenes, but also, and above all, in the unavailing remorse and the crushing despair which fall upon him at the close.

All this justifies us in saying that, broadly speaking, a line may be drawn between Æschylus and Sophocles; and that, in the history of the drama, it is the especial distinction of Sophocles to have made the action more human, to have embodied it more completely in the will and passions of man, than had

[1] *Antigone*, l. 600; ll. 806-942, especially the well-known speech—"O grave, O bridal bed, O rock-dug home"—ll. 891-942.

been done by Æschylus. And this means, as I said at starting, that he marks an important stage in the process which, on the whole, has been carried out from first to last in the history of the drama; that, if in some sense he was himself anticipated by Æschylus, it is no less true that he in turn prepared the way for the "humanism" of the modern drama, above all for the boundless humanity of Shakespeare. It also means, as I think has been generally recognised, that his genius is more specifically and intensely Greek than that of Æschylus. The genius of Greece was, after all, an essentially human genius. Its main interest lay with the world of sense, above all with the world of man. The very gods of the Greeks were cast in human shape. And if it could not be claimed for them, as it has been for Goethe, the most Greek of moderns, that they "did not make God too much a man," at least the converse would be true, that they "did not make man too much a god." And this is pre-eminently true of Sophocles. Now the same thing could hardly be said of Æschylus. In his genius there is manifestly an element which is alien to the general temper of his country, an element which perhaps can best be described as Hebraic. And this is no less the case with his treatment of man and of the elemental forces which encompass and control the life of man, than it is with his lyric inspiration and the extra-

ordinary sublimity of his language. Again and again, as we read him, we are reminded of the Hebrew prophets; above all of the greatest and most Hebraic of them, Ezekiel. And it is not for nothing that the supreme appeal of Prometheus is couched in almost the same words as the opening prophecy of Isaiah. Now, of this Hebraic element there is no trace in the genius of Sophocles. Here, for the first time in the history of the Greek drama, we are brought face to face with the Greek spirit, pure and simple; and we may add, not only for the first time but the last. Euripides, as we shall see, represents not the Greek mind, but a curious anticipation of the modern. The baffling problems of life weighed heavily upon his spirit, and he lost much of the calm which belongs to the most characteristic figures of his race. His love of effect, his striving after the unfamiliar, his interest in the abnormal, all told in the same direction. And it remains true that, of the three dramatists, Sophocles, alike by the spirit and by the outward form of his art, is the most typically Greek.

In regard to plot, again, there is a marked difference between Sophocles and Æschylus. The plots of the latter, as we have seen, are in the main of extreme simplicity. In some of his plays there can hardly be said to be a plot at all. Sophocles, on the other hand, shows a clear preference for com-

plexity. The best illustration of this is to be found, perhaps, in *Electra*, where he returns to a theme already treated by the elder dramatist. Compare *Electra* with the *Choephoroe*, and the difference of method at once becomes apparent. The latter, it will be remembered, is austerely simple. The recognition between brother and sister once accomplished, the tragedy moves on without a halt, without reversal of fortune or hope, to the predestined end, the murder of Clytemnestra. In Sophocles, identically the same train of action is handled in an entirely different manner. Orestes, who appears (as with Æschylus) in the opening lines, does not reveal himself to Electra until the play is nearing its close.[1] In the interval he has conveyed to his mother and sister, through the mouth of a faithful servant, the false tidings of his death; and in an elaborately wrought passage the whole scene, with all its lying pomp of circumstance, is unfolded before their eyes. Clytemnestra triumphs, Electra is bowed down with despair. But the thought of vengeance quickly prevails in her heart; and no sooner is Clytemnestra departed than, scornfully thrusting aside her sister, who enters with the joyful news that Orestes must have returned, she proceeds to conspire the death of Clytemnestra and her para-

[1] In the *Choephoroe* the recognition comes at l. 216 (out of 1065 lines); in *Electra*, at l. 1220 (out of 1505 lines); in the former one-fifth, in the latter four-fifths, of the action being transacted before it takes place.

mour. Chrysothemis, fully convinced by the eager proofs of Electra that Orestes is indeed dead, timidly refuses to join in the perilous attempt, and retires before the storm of contempt and indignation which breaks upon her head. Then once more Orestes enters, disguised and bearing, as he alleges, the ashes of the slain exile in his hand. A pathetic lament from the bereaved sister follows, at the end of which Orestes declares himself. He cuts short Electra's denunciations of their mother and her accomplice, and promptly enters the palace, still carrying the funeral urn. Electra stands in the doorway, to witness the promised end. The cries of Clytemnestra are immediately heard, and Electra shouts to her brother within to complete the deed. The next moment he comes forth, his arm still reeking with his mother's blood. Yet another moment, and Ægisthus approaches the palace, recalled by the joyful tidings of Orestes' death. Orestes, still disguised, wheels forth the bier holding the veiled body of Clytemnestra, and informs Ægisthus that the corpse of his dreaded enemy lies before him. As the tyrant exults, Orestes suddenly withdraws the veil, and reveals the terrible truth. Ægisthus is at once led within to be slain on the very spot where he had murdered Agamemnon.

We see at a glance at what pains Sophocles has been to complicate the action, to give variety to the

situations and emotions. The means employed may be legitimate or no. But the intention is beyond doubt; so also is the success of the dramatist in fulfilling it. Equally plain is the contrast with the severe simplicity of action, the deliberate monotony of situation, maintained during at least four-fifths of the play of Æschylus. And this is the more noticeable when we consider that the *Choephoroe* is by no means the simplest drama of the latter; that, on the contrary, there is none of them which, as a whole, is more varied or more intense in its dramatic passion; while, on the other hand, it would have been easy to instance plays of Sophocles, in particular *Œdipus*, in which the mastery of plot is still more conspicuous than in *Electra*. The example we have taken, therefore, may be regarded as a crucial one. It proves beyond possibility of question that, in elaboration of plot, Æschylus was little more than a novice, as compared with Sophocles. An indirect confirmation of this may be found in the *Poetics*. To plot, as has already been pointed out, Aristotle attached extreme, if not exaggerated importance. To him it was "the vital principle, the very soul of the drama." And it is highly significant that in his remarks on "recognition" and "reversal of fortune"—the two pillars which, in his view, bear up the whole structure of the plot—he draws his crowning instances from the plays of Sophocles; in fact, from the very play which has just

been mentioned as the supreme example of his genius in this matter, *Œdipus Tyrannus*.

Sophocles, then, is a consummate master of plot. And, as such, he lays himself open to the dangers which inevitably beset those who have made elaboration of plot the chief goal of their endeavours. Above all, he is apt to sacrifice everything to effect. As an illustration of this, I would refer once more to *Electra*. Can any one claim that this tragedy is either so true in its successive dramatic motives, or so strong in its imaginative appeal, as its far simpler, far less artfully constructed, counterpart in Æschylus? We have indeed a powerful presentment of the alternations of hope and fear in the hearts of Electra and Clytemnestra. We have a succession of brilliant episodes, the fictitious chariot-race and the fictitious death of the young hero, blended with pathetic lamentations, which the audience knows all the time to have no foundation. But where is the gradual nerving of Orestes to the deed of horror? Where is the tragic pleading between him and his mother, the instant's hesitation, the bitter cry of remorse that follows on the irrevocable deed? Where is the wild vision of the gathering Furies, the undaunted assertion of innocence, the hasty flight before the implacable avengers? All this has been thrown to the winds. The very order of the action is inverted, and inverted surely for the worse. In Æschylus, Ægisthus is the

first to perish; the climax does not come till the murder of Clytemnestra. In Sophocles, the end of the latter is hurriedly passed over, and it happens first. The whole stress, it would seem, is thrown on the slaughter of Ægisthus. That, and not the murder of the mother by the son, forms the crowning point of the action. There is, in fact, nothing to indicate that Sophocles felt the horror of the deed, the appalling tragedy of the situation with which he had set himself to deal. Napoleon, we are told, after listening to Cherubini's Opera on the same subject, impatiently asked the author why he had ended in a strain of despair and gloom. "Your hero has triumphed," he said, "you ought to have closed in the key of exultation." "He has killed his mother," was the laconic answer. And the same answer will serve as a justification of Æschylus against Sophocles.[1]

The truth is that attention to plot, important and necessary as it is, is yet a matter which needs to be jealously guarded. It is apt to degenerate into a mere love of effect. The whole history of the modern classical drama—of the romantic drama also, at least as it took shape in France and Germany—bears witness to this peril. The classical drama, in some of Corneille's tragedies and in many of

[1] It is only fair to say that, in this point, Euripides returns to the better way of Æschylus. It is a pity that he has gone far to spoil his version of the tragedy (*Electra*) by a forced naturalism and by an elaborate and highly sensational "relation" of the murder of Ægisthus.

Voltaire's, became a cunning manipulation of startling incidents, elaborately interwoven, with no high appeal to the imagination, with no moral, or even human, significance. And the same thing, though in a very different way, may be said of some at least of the dramas of Hugo. To charge this upon those who, whether by precept or example, first laid stress upon the importance of plot, to charge it upon Sophocles or Aristotle, would, it need hardly be said, be the grossest injustice. It would be equally absurd to prescribe neglect of plot as a remedy. It is true, however, that, with the cult of plot, a new danger arose to threaten the drama, and that nothing but the most constant vigilance can guard against it. The great dramatist is he who triumphs over it; or rather, who converts what might be an enemy into the surest of allies. And it is only just to remember that, if any man ever succeeded in this task, it was Sophocles himself, in his two greatest plays, *Œdipus* and *Antigone*. The former of these in particular, as Aristotle clearly felt, offers the most consummate plot that antiquity has bequeathed to us; nor has the modern drama anything that, in point of plot, can be put above it. And it is no less remarkable for dramatic intensity and dramatic truth.

The comparative failure of *Electra* suggests another reflection. This is that, among the qualities which are indispensable to a great dramatist, not the

least important is keenness and soundness of moral judgment. It was the possession of such a judgment which went far to give Shakespeare so immeasurable a superiority over many of his brother Elizabethans. It is the same thing which, in the last resort, accounts for the superiority, in this instance, of Æschylus over Sophocles. It would, of course, be absurd to say that this, in itself, is enough to make a dramatist. If it were, many a plain man who has been talking prose all his life would be as great as Shakespeare. But, given the imagination, the creative faculty, the knowledge of human nature, which are obviously the first conditions, it remains true that all these will be powerless to achieve the highest effects which lie within reach of the dramatist, unless they go hand in hand with a sure and subtle instinct in those matters which form the tissue of our moral experience, which constitute the groundwork of our action, for good or bad, in the ordinary affairs of life.

It remains to say a few words on the more formal side of the genius of Sophocles. It was inevitable that, when he humanised the theme of the drama, when he brought it down from heaven to earth, his language also should be cast in a lower key than was commonly struck by Æschylus. It was inevitable, and it was also fitting; the one change rightly carried the other in its train. Accordingly we must not look in Sophocles for the gigantic figures, the titanic

imagery, we must not look for the wildness and sublimity, of Æschylus. These things belonged to "the large utterance of the early gods"; and with the Gods and Titans they necessarily vanished. It would, however, be a fatally false judgment to suppose that the poetry of Sophocles is lacking in force or passion, that his style is, in any sense, the style of ordinary speech. He has, doubtless, less passion than Æschylus, he approaches more nearly to the language of common life. Few are the poets of whom the same might not be said. But both in thought and language he moves, and it comes naturally to him to move, on a plane far above the world in which man's daily life is cast. In language, as in thought, he is consistently ideal. The prevailing character of his style, as of his conceptions, is a marvellous harmony and sweetness, the qualities which earned for him, among his countrymen, the name of *the Bee*. But, when the fitting moment comes, he instinctively rises to a strain of higher passion, and his thoughts shape themselves unbidden in the most vivid imagery. So it is with the defiance and the lamentations of Antigone; so with the despair of Œdipus and Ajax,[1] the choric odes of *Antigone* and the two dramas on the fate of Œdipus. There is, moreover, one quality of his style to which attention was drawn by Shelley, a

[1] See, in particular, *Antigone*, ll. 450-70, 891-942; *Œdipus Tyrannus*, ll. 1369-1416; *Ajax*, ll. 430-80, 646-92, 815-65.

quality in which he has never been surpassed. That is his genius for investing the simplest objects of the external world, the most familiar imagery, with a remoteness, a subtle suggestion of things unseen, which gives to them an "almost unfathomable depth of poetry."[1] This is a power as precious as it is uncommon; and it finds its counterpart in his whole treatment of human character and passion.

On the whole, then, it may be said that Sophocles contributed two elements of great importance to the development of the drama. He brought the tragic motive more completely within the sphere of human action and human passion than Æschylus had done; and he gave greater consistency, a more closely woven texture, to the plot. To these it may be added that in his latest tragedy, *Œdipus Coloneus*, there are curious anticipations of tendencies which reappear in the later dramas, particularly in the so-called romances, of Shakespeare. The *Coloneus* is a drama of suffering rather than of action; and in this it resembles what is among the last of Shakespeare's tragedies, *King Lear*. Indeed, the very words of Lear, those words which sum up and crystallise that aspect of his fate—"I am a man more sinned against than sinning"—are almost a verbal echo of the plea of

[1] See Mrs. Shelley's note on *Prometheus Unbound*, containing an extract from her husband's manuscripts. Moxon's Edition (1869), p. 127.

Œdipus—"My deeds are deeds of suffering rather than of doing."[1] Again, the *Coloneus*, like *Cymbeline* or *The Winter's Tale* or *The Tempest*, is essentially a drama of reconciliation. The sharp contrasts of human life are here softened down; its conflicts are resolved; the victim of a cruel doom is at last reconciled with Heaven. One tragic scene excepted —that in which Œdipus, not without justice, thrusts away his injured but guilty son—the whole note is that of atonement, of "calm of mind, all passion spent." In his earlier plays Sophocles had forged one link in the chain which has made the drama the highest expression of human life and human passion. He had proved his mastery of that cunning elaboration of plot which was to remain a distinguishing mark of the classical type of tragedy. It was reserved for his latest play to give a still wider extension to the general scope of the drama; to anticipate by a flash of genius that which was to prove among the highest achievements of romantic tragedy, the search for an ultimate reconciliation, the feeling after an "ampler ether, a diviner air," in which all discords are resolved. In *Œdipus at Colonus*, he struck a note which, centuries later, was to be taken up in the romances of Shakespeare and the two masterpieces of Goethe.

[1] *Œdipus Coloneus*, ll. 266-7.

LECTURE IV

GREEK TRAGEDY: EURIPIDES

SOPHOCLES is the last representative of the purely classical spirit in Greek tragedy. With Euripides new elements force their way into prominence, the character of Greek tragedy is profoundly changed, and the classical mould is strained to the point of breaking. The genius of Euripides was full of originality; his temper was naturally restless; and, cast in a time when the traditional beliefs of the Greek world were rudely shaken and the established forms of Greek polity showed clear signs of decay, he eagerly welcomed the spirit of innovation which was at work on every side of him, and applied it with feverish activity in the field of tragedy. All this was as it should be. The drama, like all other things, must change with its surroundings. And the Greek drama, just because it was bound up so closely with the whole fabric of Greek life and thought, just because it was a pre-eminently indigenous growth,

was peculiarly sensitive to any change in the inward faith or outward institutions of the community which nurtured it. To quarrel with Euripides for seeking change is therefore unreasonable and unjust. A change of form, a change of spirit—both were probably a necessity, if Greek tragedy was to keep its vitality, if it was to be saved from the living death which inevitably comes when the old forms are retained after the breath of life has gone out of them. But in considering the work of Euripides, as of any other revolutionist, we are entitled to ask: Do these particular changes take the direction which later experience has shown to be the most fruitful of results? are they consistently carried out? and has their influence upon the subsequent course of events been, in the main, for good or for evil? The last question requires to be handled with great caution; for it is manifest that accident may here play a disturbing part. But the two first stand upon firmer ground, and they admit, in this case as in others, of a tolerably definite answer.

Let us begin by recognising the great qualities of Euripides. He was a true poet; his dramatic work is not only full of interest but has an abiding charm; he had a keen eye for the human problems which supply the matter of the tragic dramatist, a still keener for all that makes them effective on the stage. Hence his plays always act as a spur to

the intellect, and they offer a lively satisfaction to the eye. Whatever else may be true about him, so much at any rate is not to be denied. And there are further qualities which will fall to be noticed, as we go on our way.

It is clear that throughout his career as dramatist —it must be remembered that he was a slightly younger contemporary of Sophocles — he chafed against the restrictions of the classical type which came to him from the hands of the two elder dramatists, and that he worked under the fixed resolve to widen them by every means at his command. Indeed, if the traditional mould had broken utterly in the process, we have little warrant for thinking that he would have been seriously disturbed. What then was it, we may ask, in the classical model that galled him the most heavily? Against what points in the ring-fence was his attack most persistently directed? It was not, as might perhaps have been expected, the comparative lack of outward action, the practice of leaving the more stirring incidents to be told by "relation."[1] On the contrary, one of the first things to strike us in his dramas is the enormous extension given to the part of the "Messenger," the recognised medium of such descriptions. This at once fixes a barrier

[1] The death of Evadne, who hurls herself from the roof of the palace into the funeral pyre of her husband, Capaneus, would seem to be an exception. I do not recall any other instance. See *Supplices*, ll. 984-1079.

between him and the romantic rebels of a later day. Nor again, as we shall see directly, was it the tradition that the personages of tragedy must be drawn from heroic legend.[1] The mythological element is, on the whole, still stronger in him than in Æschylus and Sophocles. He introduces the gods much more freely; and he is even ready, as in the case of *Helena*, to coin legends of his own. It seems to have been rather the stately character of the traditional form that roused his discontent; the ideal atmosphere, the air of calm and remoteness, which both Æschylus and Sophocles had cast around it. To destroy that atmosphere, to bring the drama nearer to the actual interests and emotions—we can hardly say to the actual life—of his own day, to give it variety of every possible kind—variety of incident, variety of dialogue, variety of description, variety of poetic effect, variety of rhythm, variety of dress and scenery[2]—this, one would say, was his main object. And to this end he bent all the powers of his ingenuity and invention.

Now, one at least of the means he chose for this purpose is, in itself, entirely legitimate. It has often been noticed that, of all ancient dramatists, Euripides is the most pathetic. *Alcestis*, the story of the wife

[1] This tradition was defied by Æschylus in the *Persæ*, and by Phrynichus in the *Fall of Miletus*. See Herodotus, vi. 21.

[2] Hence the significance of the words, "In all things, sweet is change," *Orestes*, l. 234.

who consents to die in place of her husband, and is then miraculously restored to him, is the most familiar instance of this quality. And there are passages of that drama which, for truth and simplicity of pathos, it would be impossible to surpass. There are, however, other examples in abundance. The appeal of Iphigeneia to her father,[1] the parting between Orestes and Electra,[2] above all, the descent of Artemis to sooth the last sufferings of Hippolytus[3] —all these, and more besides, show the dramatist at his highest; and nothing has done so much to win for him the admiration and affection of his readers. It is none the less true that, by his very pathos, Euripides profoundly modified the character of tragedy as it came to him from Æschylus and Sophocles, as indeed it has been conceived by the tragic poets of all ages and nations.[4] To them, the sterner note is of the essence of tragedy; and pathos, however much it may enter into their dramas, enters only as an element, an element which is strictly subordinated to the more austere strain distinctive of tragedy. "Nothing is here for tears"—that is the silent conviction which underlies the supreme

[1] *Iphigeneia in Aulis*, ll. 1211-75, and her subsequent lament, ll. 1279-1335.

[2] *Electra*, ll. 1308-1340.

[3] *Hippolytus*, ll. 1389-1443.

[4] Aristotle describes Euripides as "the most tragic of all poets." But he is careful to limit the term to one particular point—the poet's preference for sad endings—and to add the qualifying clause, "even though the structure of his plays be otherwise faulty." The passage (*Poetics*, xiii. 6) is too often quoted without these qualifications.

creations of tragedy, the unspoken feeling they call out, to whatever age or nation they may belong. And moving as is the pathos of Euripides, we cannot but feel that it carries us, and is intended to carry us, into a region distinct from that of tragedy; a lower region, we must admit, and one nearer to that of our daily experience and emotion. I do not think that this judgment applies to *Hippolytus*, a play which, on other grounds also, would seem to stand apart from the rest of the poet's work. But I think it holds good of the other dramas just mentioned. It does so still more of such plays as *Hecuba* and the *Troades*. And the note is struck so persistently by Euripides that no estimate, for the good or the less good, can fail to take account of it.

In close connection with the pathos of Euripides, we may take his deep and innate humanity. This is a quality which is clearly distinct from the imaginative and artistic endowment of the poet. But it plays a curiously large part in his dramas, and is not seldom the inspiration of his most passionate effects. Again and again his love of justice, his zeal for mercy and pity, break out in glowing utterances; and there are two at least of his plays, the *Supplices* and the *Heracleidae*, which would seem to have been written largely with the object of commending to his fellow-citizens the faith which he himself had at heart. In each of these plays the cause of

mercy and justice is presented as bound up with the traditional policy of Athens, and as forming her chief title to glory; while in another play he goes out of his way to make a pointed attack on Sparta, on her cruelty and treachery, on her trust in brute force, and, perhaps with less justification, on the corruption of her women.[1] How far this strain of patriotic feeling, of devotion to the city of his birth and of hatred for her foes, was a diplomatic device, adopted for the sake of gaining a more favourable hearing, it is impossible to say. But it may well be that he was wholly sincere in identifying the cause of humanity with the supremacy of Athens; that, like Pericles, he regarded Athens as the "schoolmistress of Greece," the guardian of all that was best and purest and most beautiful in the Hellenic tradition. And who shall say that he was wrong? At the same time it is pretty clear that the love of humanity in him was still stronger than the love of country; and that, in so far as the latter seems to prevail, it is because Athens—

> Athens, the eye of Greece, mother of arts
> And eloquence—

to him stood for the cause of truth and justice throughout the world. We can hardly be wrong

[1] *Andromache*, ll. 445-63, 595-601, 724-6. The praises of Athens are also sung in a famous chorus of *Medea*, ll. 824-50.

in recognising the humanitarian impulse as one of the things which distinguish him most markedly from Æschylus and Sophocles, nor in connecting it with the philosophical strain in his nature and his known admiration for Socrates. In any case it is clear that, with all its attractiveness, this impulse had its perils, that it led him at times to sacrifice the strictly dramatic ends of tragedy to the purposes of the moralist and the philosopher.

Through his reflective, no less than his pathetic bent, Euripides profoundly modified the spirit of Greek tragedy. So far, however, he had done little to touch its vital character; still less had he done anything which seriously affected its traditional form. Can the same thing be said of another quality, the "naturalism" which has often been attributed to him, and which, in a certain sense, is not to be denied? Here, I think, we come to something which strikes still deeper than any change we have hitherto noticed; and it is the more necessary to define exactly the direction which his naturalism took, and the degree to which he carried it. The personages of his drama are still taken from heroic legend; but they are manifestly brought nearer to the men and women of everyday life than their prototypes in Æschylus and Sophocles. They are so in themselves, they are so still more in their dramatic setting, their external surroundings.

They are so in themselves. It is not to be denied that the characters of Euripides are apt to be less stately, that they are more violent in their passions and resolves than those of the elder dramatists. And this applies, in particular, to his women. Electra and Hermione[1] are hardly characters we should expect to meet in Æschylus or Sophocles. Nor again, though in a different way, is Medea. The ill-bred pertness of Hermione would probably have seemed trivial to them; the vindictiveness of Electra would have been rejected as savage. Euripides eagerly welcomes such sitters to his studio, and paints their portraits with unmistakable delight. But it is hard to check the conviction that they are out of keeping with the heroic framework in which they are set. And, in the case of Electra, we recall with something of resentment the noble features, here coarsened into those of a virago.

For Medea, no doubt, more is to be said. And in the earlier scenes of the play the dramatist has done everything to soften the harshness of the impression which is inevitably left by the whole. Nor can it be denied that the portrait is throughout painted with consummate subtlety, that the painter has put forth all his genius to make us feel its fidelity to nature. His heroine is a barbarian by birth and temper; she has been cruelly wronged.

[1] In *Andromache*.

What more natural than that her deeds also should be barbarous, her revenge as cruel as her wrongs? All this is very true. But when she punishes her faithless husband by murdering the children she has borne to him, our faith is staggered. And even if that point were yielded—and it is more than doubtful whether it ought—other objections still remain behind. Is not such an act too loathsome for dramatic treatment of any sort? Is it not in crying discord with a stage so ideal as the Greek? Is not the figure of Medea wholly out of harmony with the other figures, as well as with the general character, of the piece? Compare the theme as presented by Euripides with exactly the same theme as handled in one of the oldest Norse poems, the *Atla-mal*, and we at once feel the superiority of the latter. There, quite apart from the fact that the scene is not presented to the eye, the whole atmosphere is primitive and barbarous. Our conviction that so the thing must have been is never for one instant shaken. The harmony of horror and heroic daring is unbroken from beginning to end. Gudrun acts, as a barbarian would act, on an overmastering impulse. Medea refines and sophisticates at every step. Moreover, with all her savagery, there is a nobility in Gudrun to which Medea never rises. She acts not to avenge her own wrongs, but the murder of her brothers. Medea, on the contrary,

is fighting simply for herself. In view of these considerations, can we say that *Medea* has the unity of tone demanded by a poem? Can we even say that the heroine is convincing as a dramatic portrait?

The case of Phædra, I think, stands on different ground. Her passion, terrible though it be, is yet not loathsome. And the poet has spared no pains to make us feel that she is the victim of a force which no human will has the power to resist. She is in the grip of a relentless fate, and, struggle as she may, she is driven forward blindly to her doom. Even so, her innate nobility does not desert her, and she resolves to die rather than stoop to shame. It is only when the act of another has betrayed her secret that she breaks all bounds, and, to save her own fame, launches a cruel slander against her step-son. There is nothing here which can be called unnatural or repulsive; nothing which, in a modern drama at any rate, would strike us as out of place. Whether it is altogether in tune with the severe forms of the classical drama is another question. But even on this ground I cannot but think that the record of the dramatist is clear. It may, I think, be at once admitted that such a theme would have been avoided by Æschylus. But is that enough to prove that it is necessarily incompatible with the classical model? And if not, can we deny our

admiration to the man who enlarged the scope of an ideal which always tended to err on the side of exclusiveness? It is here, I believe, that the true originality of Euripides is to be sought: here that his services towards the development of the drama, as he received it from his predecessors, were the greatest. This, the introduction of new types of character and passion, was manifestly the most fruitful line of innovation that lay before him. And one can only regret that his endeavours in this direction should have been so comparatively rare; that *Hippolytus* should in fact be the only instance in which they were put forth with a consistent purpose, or in which they can be said wholly to have succeeded. In this one instance, however, we have his noblest achievement. Of all his tragedies, *Hippolytus* is the most original, the most beautiful in itself, and the most worthy to be set side by side with the masterpieces of Æschylus and Sophocles. The theme, as we shall see, was taken up by two later writers, Seneca and Racine. But, much as the latter added both in subtlety and nobility to the character of the heroine, splendid as are both his poetry and his dramatic genius, it can hardly be said that *Phèdre* is, as a whole, so great a drama as *Hippolytus*. It is certainly no greater.

Thus much as to the attempts of Euripides to widen the scope of the classical drama in respect of

character. To the outward trappings of his personages and the outward adornments of his stage he gave an attention that was far more persistent. Here his main object seems to have been variety; a variety which was often clearly intended to give a gentle shock of mild surprise to the spectator. Orestes tossing feverishly on his bed after the murder of his mother,[1] Antigone stealing timidly down the stairs to catch a sight of the invading army,[2] Electra married to a peasant—whom, however, she keeps at a respectful distance—and drawing water for her household needs,[3] Xuthus coming flushed with wine from the banquet,[4] Creusa intent upon the swaddling-clothes in which years before she had wrapped her infant,[5] Agamemnon tearing up his letters,[6] Clytemnestra stepping with the utmost pomp and circumstance from her carriage—an incident so dear to Euripides as to be twice repeated, once to an accompaniment of parcels, bandboxes, and babies[7]—the rags of Telephus,[8] the tarpaulin of Menelaus[9]; all these are instances of

[1] *Orestes*, ll. 1-315.
[2] *Phœnissae*, ll. 83-201.
[3] *Electra*, ll. 54-81.
[4] *Ion*, ll. 517-62.
[5] *Ion*, ll. 1402-32.
[6] *Iphigeneia in Aulis*, ll. 1-48.
[7] *Electra*, ll. 998-1003, *Iphigeneia in Aulis*, ll. 607-37. It is right to say that the genuineness of the latter passage has been disputed.
[8] *Telephus* has perished, but there are several allusions to it in Aristophanes; e.g. *Acharnians*, ll. 410-46. If we may judge from that passage, the same device seems to have been adopted in *Œneus*, *Philoctetes*, *Phœnix*, *Bellerophon*, all of which are lost.
[9] *Helena*, ll. 420-24, 1204-88.

the peculiarity in question. And they might easily be multiplied. They are so frequent as to betray a fixed intention on the part of the dramatist to break through the majestic mould of classical tragedy, and to bring its stately figures, if not in soul and character, at least in outward garb, bearing, and surroundings down to the level of common life, if not below it. It was this, more perhaps than anything else, which excited the ridicule of his own day, an echo of which is to be found in the satire of Aristophanes. Nor can it be said that the satire is undeserved. It was well that Euripides should attempt to widen the bounds of classical tragedy. It was not well that he should pay so little heed to the weightier matters, to the treatment of passion, character, and incident; that his zeal should chiefly spend itself upon the mint and anise of outward circumstance and stage-properties and costumes.

All this has led some critics to describe Euripides as a "realist," which may be taken as an extreme form of the belief already indicated, that he has a vein of naturalism. This, however, would seem to be an exaggeration, and that for two reasons. In the first place, it would be a very poor sort of realism which confined itself—or, with few exceptions, tended to confine itself—to the mere externals of the drama. The true field of realism is in the

treatment of character. Its essence is to paint character, not with a bold sweep, but in minute detail; to paint every side of it, bad as well as good; to paint it as moulded by outward circumstance and surroundings; to paint it, finally—for this has been the general tendency of the great realists—rather in its weakness than its strength, rather on the dark side than the bright. Now, if the account just given be at all correct, it cannot be said, unless of some few dramas, that Euripides concerns himself greatly with character at all. He is, on the whole, more interested in circumstances and surroundings. And, so far as he does deal with character, his method is at least as much that of the idealist as the realist. Menelaus among his men, Medea and Phædra among his women, these are perhaps the only instances that could plausibly be brought on the other side. And if we except Menelaus, whom neither party will be particularly anxious to claim,[1] even these instances will hardly stand a close examination. Both are, in truth, conceived rather under the romantic than the realist inspiration.

And this brings us to the second, and more significant, ground for rejecting the name "realist" as applied to Euripides. Alike in his treatment of character and his treatment of circumstance, he

[1] Aristotle cites him as an example of "causeless baseness."—*Poetics*, chap xv.

shows but little of the realist method. Of the realist temper, the realist motive, he has nothing at all. The impulse of the realist is to paint the thing simply because he finds it; his ideal is strict fidelity to nature, to matter of fact. Hence his wealth of detail, his tendency to reproduce even trivial detail, lest anything should be lost. Euripides, no doubt, paints detail in abundance. Not, however, because it is in the subject before him, not because it is offered to him by nature. On the contrary, he carefully selects his detail; he takes a great deal less than he leaves. And I do not think we shall be wrong in saying that what he does take, he takes not because it is "true to life," but because it is picturesque. He takes it not for its own sake, but for the sake of a contrast with something else; with something which is either present to the eye, or on which he may fairly count as being present to the imagination, of the spectator. It is the rags of a king, the destitution of a princess, the degradation of a hero, that in reality concern him; the contrast between what the spectator would expect and what he actually finds. In other words, so far from being a realist, he is in fact a romanticist of a very pronounced and highly specialised type.

It is sometimes assumed that he retained the figures of heroic legend only on compulsion, and that, had he been free to do so, he would have

swept them away for men and women drawn from a very different world, the world of familiar experience, the world of his own day and his own city. I cannot think that this assumption is borne out by the facts or, where the facts fail, by the inferences which other and kindred facts seem inevitably to suggest. If this had really been the mind of Euripides, there is no reason why he should not have forestalled, or followed, the example of his younger rival Agathon, whom we know to have done something of this kind.[1] Still less is there any reason why he should have gone out of his way to draw from the world of Greek mythology: why the gods, as to whom it is almost certain that he was profoundly sceptical, and whom there was absolutely no compulsion to introduce at all, should play a far larger—if a far more mechanical—part in his tragedies than in those of Æschylus and Sophocles.[2] The truth is that by poetic instinct, if not by reason, he was closely wedded to the forms inherited from the past; that his imagination clung to them with peculiar fondness; and that, divorced from them, his genius would have been changed beyond all power of recognition. What is assumed to be mere accident

[1] In his *Anthos* or *The Flower* (the title, however, is uncertain, and may be *Antheus*—a proper name), in which "both the names and the incidents are the poet's invention." See Aristotle, *Poetics*, chap ix.

[2] Out of seventeen tragedies by Euripides, the gods appear in ten. Out of the remaining seven, there is a divine personage in one (*Andromache*), and a ghost in another (*Hecuba*).

is, in fact, of the very essence of his tragedies. It supplied the romance, the craving for something remote from familiar experience, which was, I believe, one of the dominant notes of his temperament, alike as dramatist and as poet.

Euripides was, in truth, a romantic to the very core. And it is not hard to satisfy ourselves of this by a few examples. Think, for instance, of the romantic settings which he has given to many of his plays; above all to those which common consent admits to be the greatest, and where, if anywhere, we must look for the true bent of his genius. Think in particular, of *Medea* and *Hippolytus* and the *Bacchae*. Take away the romantic setting from any of these—strike out the barbarous background of the first, the mythological background of the two last—and half the charm will have vanished.[1] In the case of *Medea* and the *Bacchae*, we may almost say there will be nothing left. Think again of the romantic touches scattered throughout his tragedies: of Cassandra's ghastly ravings,[2] of Ion scaring the wild birds, the swans and eagles, from the temple where he has been nurtured,[3] of the seven queens prostrate before the altar in the

[1] In the case of *Hippolytus*, a comparison with Racine's *Phèdre* will illustrate this. By sacrificing the bond between Hippolytus and Artemis—the offering of the garland in the opening scene, the descent of the goddess at the close—Racine did much to set his tragedy at a disadvantage in comparison with that of Euripides. It needed all the subtlety of the rest of his drama to restore the balance.

[2] *Troades*, ll. 353-461. [3] *Ion*, ll. 153-83.

Supplices, of Iolaus shepherding the outcast children in the *Heracleidae*. Think, once more, of the set descriptions, so unfailing in the plays of Euripides, so picturesque in their detail, and so highly wrought. That of Pentheus torn in pieces by his wife and mother and the other Mænads in the *Bacchae*,[1] that of Orestes and Pylades discovered by the cowherds in *Iphigeneia*,[2] that of the pictures embroidered on the tent in *Ion*,[3] are perhaps the most elaborate. But they could be paralleled more or less closely from almost any other of his plays. And with the possible exception of the chariot-race in *Electra*, there is nothing either in Æschylus or Sophocles of which the intention is so manifestly that of the word-painter, of which the spirit is so decisively romantic. Think, finally, of those plays which are pure pieces of fantasy, or adventure, or both together: such plays as *Helena*, or *Orestes*, or *Ion*. Here the poet has exhausted his invention to heap impossibility on impossibility, to pile Pelion upon Ossa in the way of far-fetched fancy and highly-spiced adventure. Taking all these things together, can we resist the conclusion that they betray the romanticist of pure blood, that they could not possibly have proceeded from a realist?

Touches of realism, or something closely akin to

[1] *Bacchae*, ll. 1043-1152. [2] *Iphigeneia in Tauris*, ll. 260-339.
[3] *Ion*, ll. 1132, 65.

it, no doubt he has. But so have the romanticists of other days, and perhaps a clearer consciousness of their art. So has Shakespeare, so has Coleridge, so above all has Hugo. The telling detail, the unexpected descent into the region of hard fact and crude reality, can go perfectly well with the romantic motive, the romantic effect. They have always been an accredited weapon in the armoury of romance. When skilfully employed, so far from impairing, they decisively enhance the romantic impression. The porter of *Macbeth*, the biscuit-worms of Coleridge, the brass knob of the door handle in *Les Misérables*, are instances in point. So in another, a far more questionable, way are the homely touches, the realistic adornments of the heroes and heroines of Euripides. In these matters it is not enough merely to note the presence of certain qualities. If the critic stops there, he has done less than half his task. He must go on to inquire what is the proportion they bear, the relation they stand in, to the general economy of the whole. And in the case of Euripides, it is pretty clear that the realism is not an independent element, but that it is strictly subordinated to an effect which has all the qualities of romance.

Indeed we may go further than this. It is difficult to resist the impression that the dominant note in his dramas, the ruling passion of his genius,

is the love of effect; that, so long as an effect was obtained, he was comparatively indifferent as to the means by which it was secured.[1] Hence, in all probability, his extraordinary recklessness in the choice of themes. A modernisation of antique legend, the creation of a legend more fantastic than anything in antiquity; an indictment of the gods, a glorification of the worst qualities attributed to the gods—it seems to have mattered little, so long as an effective subject was the result, so long as a good opening was found for picturesque detail, for strokes likely to catch the ear of the audience, for scenes which would take a strong grip of their imagination. Hence, perhaps we may add, the loose construction of his plays, the enormous extension of "relations," the immoderate use of the *deus ex machinâ*, the childish device of the prologue, which serves as a labour-saving machine, a theatrical gazette to inform the audience of such circumstances as the dramatist would not be at the pains to incorporate in the regular action of his piece. Hence, finally, the sententious sayings, the rhetorical discourses, the set arguments, often manifestly sophistical, in which he revels. An attempt has been made to defend the last peculiarity on the ground that it

[1] Longinus had clearly felt the artificiality of Euripides. "Not being by nature sublime," he says, "Euripides often does violence to himself to produce a tragic effect, in the way of sublimity." And he goes on to describe the poet as "lashing himself into a fury."—*De Sublimitate*, chap. xv.

faithfully reflects an inveterate habit of the Athenian mind, a favourite fashion of the society for which the dramatist composed. That may be very true. But it is one of those defences which are more damaging than any admission, and are obviously the last resource of an advocate in distress. This, in fact, is precisely the complaint which may be made against Euripides: that he deliberately put the lower end before the higher; that, so long as he could please the audience of the moment, he was ready to sacrifice the abiding purposes of imaginative art. It is the duty of the dramatist to select what may be moulded to those purposes. He is under no obligation to follow the fashions of the hour or the year.

But, with all his blemishes, Euripides remains a great figure in poetry, a landmark of the first importance in the history of the drama. The changes that he brought into the form and spirit of Greek tragedy are not, indeed, of the kind which is sometimes supposed. They are in the direction not of realism, but of romance. Yet none the less they had the effect of including much that the austere ideal of his predecessors had decisively rejected, of extending the range of matter on which the dramatist could draw, of giving flexibility to the mould created by Æschylus and Sophocles. That, in doing this, he went far to

destroy the perfection of the classical model must, I think, be admitted. He was, in fact, labouring rather for the future than the present: for a time when the temper of men should have been changed by a series of revolutions, rather than for the Greek world by which his view was inevitably bounded. The immediate future did little to profit by his experiments. But that was his misfortune rather than his fault. The creative spirit of the Greeks, at least in the field of tragic drama, had spent its force by the time of his death. And nearly five centuries were to pass before his work was seriously taken up. His influence on Seneca can hardly be overrated. And both directly and through Seneca it was at least as great on the men of the Renaissance. Thus, by a double irony, the man who wrote largely for the effect of the moment did not come into his inheritance till nearly two thousand years after his death; the dramatist who least represented the genius of classical antiquity was accepted by the moderns as its typical figure. The star of Æschylus and Sophocles paled into insignificance before that of their rival; Sophocles counted for little,[1] Æschylus for nothing, in the birth of the modern drama. Here Euripides and his Roman

[1] The only instance to the contrary, I think, is that of Trissino's *Sofonisba*, which contains more than one adaptation both from *Antigone* and *Ajax*. Even here, however, the debt to the *Alcestis* of Euripides is still larger.

disciple stand virtually alone. And their influence on the romantic drama was hardly less great, and far more fruitful, than on the classical revival. That however, is a subject of formidable extent, and I must reserve what our limits will allow me to say of it until the next lecture, in which I hope to speak of Seneca.

LECTURE V

ROMAN TRAGEDY: SENECA

WITH Euripides the history of Greek tragedy, as it has come down to us, abruptly closes. And before turning to the next chapter of the story, we may pause for a moment to review the ground we have already traversed. For our purposes, Æschylus may be called the creator of the Greek drama. It was he who peopled the stage with gods and heroes, he who cast the majestic framework in which they were to move. It was he who "made the dialogue the protagonist." It was he who first found the true tragic theme, who first sounded the depths of passion, hope, despair, and invincible resolution. In its main outline all this was retained by Sophocles. But two changes of great significance were carried out. On the one hand, the element of plot, of the closely woven tissue of incidents and situations, was carefully elaborated. On the other hand, the dramatic theme was brought more completely within the world of human passion, and, by a natural conse-

quence, the workings of that passion were painted, if not with greater force, at least with more subtlety and minuteness. Moreover, by exclusion of the more primitive and titanic elements of Æschylean tragedy, a greater unity, a more complete harmony, was given to the general tenor of the whole. What Euripides did in his turn will be fresh in our memory. He attempted a greater variety of passion, he gave a far greater variety of incident and surrounding. These and other changes that he made, however, were not such as easily to harmonise with one another; still less, perhaps, with the classical groundwork on which they were imposed. His naturalism brought the drama nearer to common life. His romanticism worked in exactly the opposite direction. Neither was altogether in keeping with the ideal form, the ideal characters, which he inherited from his forerunners. But for that very reason he stood closer to the essentially modern temper of Rome and the Renaissance, and appealed to it more directly. His very detachment from the Greek spirit won him a readier hearing from men reared under new conditions and striving after other ideals. Hence his influence on the subsequent growth of the drama far surpasses that of his greater rivals. The remainder of our inquiry will do much to illustrate this assertion.

We pass over five hundred years, or nearly so,

and pause on Seneca. He is the one tragic poet of Rome whose work has come down to us, and, so far as we know, he had but few fellow-labourers in the field.[1] Of his identity we cannot be certain. He may or may not have been the well-known philosopher and statesman;[2] opinions differ. For our purpose, however, the point is of no importance. We have only to consider the place which his tragedies hold in the history of the drama. And from this point of view he is well worthy of arresting our attention. His plays are powerful in themselves. They are still more significant from the vast influence which they wielded on the revival of the drama, whether classical or romantic, at the time of the Renaissance.

What, then, is the line of succession in which he stands? What are the characteristics which he either introduced, or deepened, in the general nature of tragedy, as he received it from the Greeks? In the main, it is clear that he based himself on Euripides, that he adopted and carried further many of the changes initiated by the third of the Greek tragedians. Like Euripides, he was a powerful master of dramatic situations: the more tensely strung, the more highly

[1] Ennius (c. 200 B.C.), Attius (c. 120 B.C.), and Varius, a contemporary of Virgil, are the chief names. Ovid wrote a *Medea*. Attius, in addition to various tragedies on Greek subjects, wrote two on Roman themes, *Decius* and *Brutus*.

[2] If he was, his plays would belong to about 50 A.D.

spiced, the better. Like Euripides, but to a far greater extent, he abounds in declamation and description. Like Euripides, but again in a more extreme fashion, he delights in epigrams and sententious sayings. Like Euripides finally, but once more in a higher degree, he has a curious eye for romantic incidents and picturesque adornments. Let us illustrate each of these points by a few instances.

And first, his mastery of dramatic situation. The best example of this—and I begin with one which seems to me in every way admirable—is to be found in *Troas*, which I should say is altogether the finest drama that he wrote. The subject of the tragedy is the vengeance taken by the Greeks, at the bidding of the shade of Achilles, upon the surviving Trojans. Apart from Prologue and Epilogue—which give us respectively the lament of Andromache, and, in "relation," the sacrifice of her son Astyanax and her husband's sister Polyxena—there are three acts, each of which presents a striking and truly dramatic situation. In the first, Pyrrhus, the son of Achilles, demands of Agamemnon the fulfilment of his father's behest; and the dispute between them is a masterpiece of dramatic skill. In the second, Ulysses, by a stroke of cunning, compels Andromache to reveal the hiding-place of her son. Here the conflict in the heart of the unhappy mother between reverence for her husband's tomb and devotion to her son is

painted with extraordinary force. In the third, Helen, loathing her mission, informs Andromache and Hecuba of the fate preparing for Polyxena. And once more the anguish of the mother, Hecuba, is rendered with speaking truth and with a simplicity which is rare indeed in Seneca. The power of this tragedy is thrown into further relief by comparison with the two dramas, perhaps the feeblest which have come down to us, written by Euripides on the same subject, the *Troades* and *Hecuba*. The play of Seneca has more unity, more dramatic genius, and a truer pathos—it is moreover, far more effective—than either of these.

And this brings us to another point, the highly wrought, the melodramatic, element in the plays of Seneca. As with Euripides, this is to be seen in his treatment of character, it is to be seen still more in his treatment of situation. For an illustration of both aspects we may turn to two plays in which, as in our last instance, he takes up a theme that Euripides had treated before him, *Hippolytus* and *Medea*. In the *Hippolytus* of Euripides nothing is more remarkable than the pains which the dramatist has taken to soften all that is shocking in the passion of Phædra for her stepson. She is stricken to the heart with shame at her own degradation; she has resolved to take her life rather than submit to it; she buries her secret deep within her heart; and it is

dragged from her only by the artful persistence of a trusted servant. In all this Euripides followed an instinct not only morally true but dramatically sound. Had he always written thus, he would have disputed the palm with Æschylus or Sophocles, and ranked among the supreme dramatists of the world. Contrast with this the conception and methods of Seneca. It would not be fair to say that the Phædra of the latter feels no shame. On the contrary, she professes it in abundance. But in her first words, and without a hint of prompting from another, she loudly proclaims her terrible secret, and bitterly laments that Hippolytus is insensible to love. In the following act, she throws off her queenly robe and, in the hope to win her stepson's favour, clothes herself in the scanty garments of an Amazon and huntress. The scenic effect is doubtless very great. But how much of dramatic truth and moral delicacy has been sacrificed to attain it? The same indifference to the higher ends of the drama, the same worship of scenic effect, might be traced through the remainder of the play. But we pass at once to *Medea*. The *Medea* of Euripides, as we have seen, is open to grave objections. Far more is this the case with that of Seneca. Euripides, it is true, presents his heroine as a monster. But he is careful not to unfold the full recklessness of her cruelty till he has done all that was humanly possible to throw our sympathies on her

side, to create a strong prejudice in her favour. We have seen her bowed to the earth beneath her wrongs, we have heard her threaten to avenge them on her husband and his accomplice, we have watched her buffeted by a hundred insults and by hypocrisies worse than insults, before she reveals the full horror of her purpose, before she swears to involve her own children in the general slaughter. Even then, the thing may be incredible or repulsive. But at least the dramatist has spared no pains to blind us to the fact, to offer every palliation that was possible. Now of all this there is no trace in Seneca. In her very first speech, that which opens the play, his Medea announces her design against her children; and from that moment onwards she never ceases to glory in her wickedness. With her, we may fairly say, it is crime for crime's sake; the more unheard of, the more staggering, the better. She "does not commit crimes for her designs, she forms designs that she may commit crimes." What Burke, rather perversely, said of the French Revolutionists may be applied with much truth to the Roman dramatist. No doubt there is more than a trace of this in the latter part of the play of Euripides; and it is one of the things which are most damaging to its greatness. But in Seneca it is paraded with far more insistence, and it is hurled at our head, almost in the first line, without one softening touch or one word of prepara-

tion. The same thing appears no less clearly at the close. In Euripides, Medea at least has the grace to slay her children behind the scene. In Seneca, she mounts to an upper window of the palace, and there, in full sight of Jason, who kneels below imploring mercy, she cuts the throat first of one child, then of the other. Having accomplished her purpose, having stunned the world with horror, she rides off in triumph on the chariot of the Sun. Once more, a masterpiece of scenic effect. Once more, an entire lack of dramatic delicacy. Yet in spite of these defects, perhaps because of them, a special interest attaches to this character and to the one other which seems to have been conceived under she same inspiration; the character of Atreus in *Thyestes*. In their open profession of villainy, in their deliberate effort to amaze and appal mankind, there is little doubt that these characters are the ancestors of a whole class which meets us again and again in the Elizabethan drama. Barabas in the *Jew of Malta*, Lorenzo in the *Spanish Tragedy*, Richard of Gloucester, these are the most familiar examples of it. But it reappears in *Antonio's Revenge* and *The Malcontent* of Marston; and through him it was transmitted to the Atheist, we may add perhaps to the Revenger, of Tourneur. And a softened echo of it is to be found in the *White Devil* of Webster. In many of these the groundwork of Seneca is doubtless crossed with

reminiscences of Machiavelli, or rather the image of that sinister figure which popular imagination had conjured up. But the debt to Seneca is unmistakable. And it is one of the points in which his influence on the Elizabethans is most clearly marked and most fruitful of imaginative effect.

There is, however, one particular device, which deserves more than a passing notice. And that, not only for its intrinsic value, which is considerable, but for the unequalled fascination which it had for the earlier Elizabethans. This is the employment of the Ghost; and, in especial, of the Ghost who comes to execute revenge. Neither in the general nor in the particular form was Seneca the inventor of the Ghost. Euripides was familiar with it, though he uses it in the most bungling and ineffective manner. What could be less impressive, what less in keeping with its known character, than that a ghost should appear at the rising of the curtain to put the audience in possession of the facts which it is necessary, or rather, convenient to the author, that they should be aware of? Yet this is the function entrusted to the ghost of Polydorus in the *Hecuba* of Euripides. In this respect Seneca may be readily admitted to have bettered the instruction of his master. In *Thyestes*, for instance, the ghost of Tantalus presents himself, not to save the author trouble, not to serve the purpose of a play-bill, but driven by the Furies;

in part to aggravate his own sufferings—for even Hell has no tortures comparable to those of the house of Atreus—in part to join with the Furies, one of whom stands by him on the stage, in launching a curse upon his doomed descendants. This may be melodramatic, but it is highly impressive. And that is more than can be said for the newspaper-ghost of *Hecuba*. In the companion play of Seneca, *Agamemnon*, the device is carried a step further. Here the ghost of Thyestes is essentially the spirit of revenge. And that was the specific form under which the ghost passed into the tragedy of the Elizabethans. The most notable instance of this is to be found in the *Spanish Tragedy*, the most popular play of its time, in which the ghost of the murdered Andrea, hand in hand (so to speak) with the Spirit of Revenge, appears at the beginning of each Act to incite the living to exact vengeance for his death. And the ghost of *Hamlet*, the most famous of all dramatic spirits, is clearly an offshoot of Andrea, though an offshoot grafted by the hand of genius. One instance among many of the debt which the Elizabethans, and Shakespeare certainly not the least of them, owed to the rhetorical and melodramatic dramatist of Rome. Curiously enough, in this particular instance the debt goes back, all unconsciously, to Æschylus. It may be doubted whether even the ghost of Hamlet's father produces an effect so appalling as that of

Clytemnestra, goading the Furies on the track of Orestes, in the *Eumenides*.[1] That, in all probability, was the source from which Seneca took the hint, and, as so often, spoiled it in the taking. Not that the ghost of Thyestes is at all to be despised. But he is not so impressive as either his spiritual mother, or his spiritual descendant; either as the ghost of Clytemnestra, or the ghost of "the vanished majesty of Denmark."

What is true of the melodramatic vein in Euripides is equally so of the declamatory and descriptive. These also are taken over by Seneca, and greatly extended in the process. The Messenger's speech, for instance, plays an inordinate part in Euripides. It plays a part more inordinate yet in Seneca. It is the *bravura* movement which we invariably look for in both dramatists, and which we as invariably find. But, whereas in Euripides it is commonly limited to a hundred lines, with a few extra thrown in for make-weight, in Seneca it is at least twice extended generously to half as much again.[2] Now, however natural under the conditions of the classical stage such episodes may be, it must be admitted that they are in the nature of an accretion, not to say an excrescence; that, while the

[1] The appearance of the spirit of Darius in the *Persae* is deeply impressive; but it stands on rather different grounds.

[2] *Agamemnon*, ll. 415-582, a description of a storm; and *Thyestes*, ll. 620-786, the murder of the sons of Thyestes and the banquet which followed.

"relation" is made, the real action of the drama inevitably stands still; and that the two greater dramatists of the Greeks, with the one unhappy exception of Sophocles in *Electra*, are at obvious pains to keep it within bounds. This is especially true of Æschylus. The *Persae* is the one play in which the Messenger plays a dominant part; and his speech is one of the most thrilling things in the whole body of the Greek drama. In four out of the six remaining plays, there is no Messenger at all. In the fifth, the Messenger, mounted on a watch-tower, recounts to the citizens the fortunes of the battle that is waging beneath the walls; his words have the force of deeds that are being transacted before our eyes.[1] Euripides was troubled with no such scruples. Still less was Seneca. Both dramatists revelled in these essentially undramatic episodes. Both eagerly seized the opportunity to indulge their brilliant gifts of description.

So it is also with the more dramatic portions of these tragedies. Seneca, following in the steps of Euripides, and, as usual, improving on his model, turns each speech into a declamation. The declamation is not seldom extremely fine; there are few things in Euripides finer in their way than the scene between Phædra and Theseus in the last Act of *Hippolytus*.

[1] *Seven against Thebes*, ll. 422-652. His "relation" is much broken by dialogue.

Yet even here there is a hint too much of rhetoric; and in other passages—for instance, the lurid scene between the ghost of Tantalus and Megæra at the beginning of *Thyestes*—the hint swells into a cry.[1] Nor is this all. That the declamations should teem with mythological allusions is bad enough in itself. It is still worse when such allusions are put, as they often are, on the lips of the inevitable nurse—one of the numerous properties inherited by Seneca from Euripides. The *Classical Dictionary* has been ransacked for the purpose; and the unhappy modern is often driven to his Lemprière before he can see his way through the jungle of the nurse's learning.[2] Here again, no one who is familiar with the earlier Elizabethan drama can fail to trace the influence of Seneca.

In epigram and sharp sentences, in the art of logic-chopping and hair-splitting, Seneca more than follows the example of Euripides. He has not,

[1] A curious illustration of Seneca's rhetoric may be found at the end of *Agamemnon* (l. 938). Electra, having handed the child Orestes to the safe care of Strophius, follows the departing chariot with the triumphant cry, *Excessit, abiit.* These are the very words which open one of Cicero's famous declamations against Catiline. But the exigencies of metre have caused an alteration of order which goes far to spoil the quotation.

[2] Perhaps the most grotesque instance is to be found in *Octavia*, which, though it can hardly be by Seneca himself, is manifestly of his school. The nurse, a Roman of the first century, consoles the heroine for her desertion by Nero with a long list of the provocations given by Jupiter to Juno (*Octavia*, ll. 198-218). Altogether, the nurse of Euripides and Seneca is ancestress of the confidante of the French classical stage. She appears in five out of the ten plays attributed to Seneca. In one of them, *Octavia*, her part is doubled, both the heroine and her rival being provided with a lady's maid. In a sixth, *Thyestes*, there is a male slave, or valet, who fulfils the same function.

indeed, those interminable screeds of repartee—of "thrusting and parrying in bright monostich," extending sometimes to more than a hundred lines[1] —in which Euripides exulted. And for this relief we must be thankful. But he abounds still more profusely in epigrams and apophthegms, some of them, it may be freely admitted, uncommonly good; and he is still more reckless in his choice of the persons who deliver them. His nurses, for instance, have a fine literary sense, and might have taken lessons from Congreve or Sheridan.[2] In some editions of his plays, the bulk of the text is printed in italics, Roman letters being reserved for the sharp sayings and epigrams. And as we look down the pages, we are amazed to see the number of these oases peppered about amid the surrounding desert. In this respect also, the influence of Seneca was strong upon the earlier Elizabethans; and we need only refer to a famous passage of *Richard III.* for an illustration.[3] The passage of Shakespeare is doubtless far more dramatic than anything of the kind to be found in Seneca, or, for that matter, in Euripides either. But it is curious as a survival of the classical influence upon the least classical of writers.

Yet more significant are the obviously romantic touches in which the plays of Seneca abound. In

[1] e.g. *Ion*, ll. 264-368.

[2] e.g. *Medea*, ll. 153-76; *Hippolytus*, ll. 128-272.

[3] *Richard III.* act IV. sc. iv. ll. 342-67.

the very tempest and whirlwind of his classical passion, he loves to transport us to the world of the picturesque, the unfamiliar, the fantastic, above all, the supernatural, to which, once more, Euripides had shown him the way. Apart from his ghosts, which have already been mentioned, the most obvious illustrations of this are to be found in two scenes of *Œdipus* and two of *Medea*.[1] The former of the two scenes of *Œdipus* brings upon the stage the offering of sacrifice by Teiresias and the ghastly prophecies of coming woe which he draws from the resulting omens. The latter, which is in the nature of a Messenger's speech, describes the evocation of the shade of Laius by Teiresias and the curse which the spirit hurls against his stricken race. The former might, up to a certain point, be paralleled by the description of the sacrifice in the *Electra* of Euripides. But, besides that this is recounted merely in "relation," Euripides handles the incident in a far less sombre way, with infinitely less suggestion of the supernatural. And the same thing applies still more forcibly to the latter scene, which seeks and finds an intensity of supernatural horror, never attempted by Euripides. The two passages of *Medea* virtually form one continuous scene which recites the incantations that summon the powers of darkness to aid the heroine in

[1] *Œdipus*, ll. 291-402, 530-658; *Medea*, ll. 670-738, 739-840.

gathering her poisons, and paints the concoction of the venomous drugs which she smears on the fatal robe destined for her rival. Such scenes may be said to trace their origin to the romantic pictures of Euripides, of which I spoke in the last lecture. And in their turn they served as the model of scenes lavishly scattered about the early Elizabethans; for instance, the scene in *Tamburlaine*, which describes the symbolic colours assumed by the grim hero on the successive days of the siege of a doomed city, or the lurid passage of the *Spanish Tragedy*, which paints the road to hell. But neither by his forerunner, nor by his followers, is the brush so heavily loaded as by Seneca. The rhetoric of the Roman is more than questionable; but in command of all the effects of horror he is hardly to be surpassed.

From all this it is clear that Seneca, himself following in the footsteps of Euripides, gave a more rhetorical and declamatory turn to the drama than is to be seen in any of his predecessors; that this extended to the whole presentation of character, as well as to the diction and style; and that, as with Euripides, it went hand in hand on the one side with a marked abuse of epigram and sententious argument, on the other side with a strong tendency towards the introduction of romantic episodes and descriptions, of all that appeals to the sense of horror, and, in particular, of the supernatural. It

is only when we remember this, and when we further consider the vast influence which he wielded on the classical revival of the same date, that the strange blending of classical with romantic which meets us in the earlier Elizabethans is to be understood. It would be difficult to say whether the classical or the romantic drama of modern times stands more deeply in his debt.

Before leaving the tragedy of the ancients it is well to notice one special point which there has been no opportunity of considering. That is the development of the Chorus. In Æschylus, as we saw, the Chorus still takes a large part in the direct action of the piece. In two at least of his plays, the *Supplices* and *Eumenides*, it might fairly be described as the principal actor. Even in *Agamemnon*, the general effect of which is far less primitive, it plays an important part, and in the final scene it is not far from coming to blows with Clytemnestra and her accomplice. When we turn to Sophocles we are conscious of a marked change in its position. It now stands aloof from the direct action. Its part is confined to lively sympathy or dignified rebuke, to pleas for mercy towards man and piety towards the gods. The one play in which it returns to something of its older functions is *Œdipus Coloneus*. There the Chorus welcomes the persecuted king to his last refuge; it stands forward as the protector

of innocence, the champion of divine and human mercy. But in this play, as has already been noticed, the action is comparatively slight. Its appeal lies mainly to our sympathy with suffering, to the hallowed associations of a particular religious worship. It was not unnatural therefore that the Chorus should here return to something of its ancient rights, that the general practice of the author should here be set aside. The change begun by Sophocles was carried still farther by Euripides. With him the Chorus, as a rule, ceases even to advise. It sings picturesque hymns, it makes pathetic lamentations, more or less closely related to the action of the piece, but with no bearing on the conduct of the personages. Apart from this, it tends to sink more and more into the position of confidante, a position which, in *Hippolytus*, at any rate, it shares with the officious nurse. The latter function is dropped by Seneca, the former is retained; and many of the most striking passages in his tragedies, as indeed in those of Euripides, are to be found in the choric odes. These, however, with one notable exception,[1] are rather in the nature of interludes than integral parts of the drama; and the same might be said, though in a less degree, of the Chorus in Euripides.[2]

[1] *Troas*, ll. 66-159.

[2] Aristotle clearly felt the difference between the Chorus of Sophocles and that of Euripides, though he does not define it, and it may be doubted whether

Altogether it is clear that, from the time of Euripides onward, the Chorus was little more than a survival; an excresence doomed sooner or later to be lopped off. It reappears in several of the earlier plays of the Renaissance. But all the outward conditions of the drama were now hopelessly against it. And in spite of repeated attempts to galvanise it into fresh life, it vanished no less from the classical than the romantic drama of the moderns.

Again we leap forward, this time over nearly fifteen hundred years, and find ourselves in the dawn of the classical revival. In the interval the drama, for our purposes, had been a blank. For I cannot convince myself that either the Mystery Plays, or their successors the Moralities, had any substantial bearing, anything more than a sporadic influence, upon the subsequent course of tragedy. With comedy the case would be very different. Let us attempt then to realise what was the effect of the classical revival, what its significance to the men of the Renaissance.

Classical civilisation, classical literature, had been buried under the ruins of the barbarian invasions. The knowledge of Greek had, for practical purposes,

he realised its full importance. "The Chorus," he says, "ought to be one of the actors, and to be an integral part of the whole play, and to take a share in the action—not, however, as in Euripides, but as in Sophocles." He goes on to speak of Agathon as being the first to use the Chorus "as an interlude."—*Poetics*, chap. xviii.

entirely vanished. That of Latin — if, for the moment, we may confine the term to the literature of the Republic and the first century of the Empire —was limited to a comparatively few authors, and it was approached in a moralising, and therefore entirely unclassical, spirit. When Greek literature was rediscovered, when Latin literature was once more read by its light, it was a new world to which they were given back. The old institutions, the old framework of society, had been swept away. Two rival powers, each of which was entirely alien to the spirit of the ancient world, held the field— the Medieval Church now tottering to its fall, and the Feudal State which, however little we may like to think it, still held the germ of the Modern State within its womb. Can we wonder that men who watched the dreary struggle between these two powers, who saw the inexpressible barrenness of the literature which languished beneath their shadow — a literature which since the generation of Boccaccio and Chaucer seemed to have fallen under a blight—should have turned with unfeigned and infinite relief to the two great literatures of the ancient world? They forgot, if they had ever known, all that Medieval literature had given to Europe. They forgot the primitive poetry, to us so priceless in value, of the Norse, the Old English, the Germans, and the French. They forgot the

courtly poetry which succeeded it, the brilliant fruit of chivalry and romance. They forgot the great creation of Dante, inspired though it was, in respect of form, by the very models which they worshipped. Nothing found favour in their eyes which did not bear the stamp of the classical form and the classical spirit. And, nurtured as they had been on the formless void of Medieval Latin, on the survivals of a dying civilisation, can we wonder at their enthusiasm? As they turned to the treasures of the "new learning," might they not naturally say: Here is something utterly different from anything we have seen before; here is a new fountain of thought and feeling opened for us to draw from; here is a perfection of imaginative form, such as we had never conceived possible? Such was the spell that classical literature cast upon the generation which immediately followed the revival of learning, the spell which held Europe bound for at least a century and a half.

In no field was the possession more complete and absolute than in the drama. The old Mystery and Miracle Plays were contemptuously thrust aside. The new life that was rising, the keen and vivid passions which were stirring on all hands and seemed to cry out for a dramatist to reproduce them, were as if they had no existence. It was the themes of the ancient world that alone seemed worthy of

attention; the forms of the ancient drama that alone seemed worthy of imitation. In this new-born zeal the men of the new learning were blind to distinctions which to us are as clear as day. Between Latin and Greek, between one ancient dramatist and another, they made no difference. The elder dramatists and Euripides, Euripides and Seneca—all were lumped together as classics, and all were equally surrounded with the classical halo. Æschylus and Sophocles, indeed, seem to have been little studied. It was the most questionable of the Greek dramatists, to a much greater degree it was Seneca, who stood for the universal model. It is the figure of Seneca which really dominates the destinies of the new drama.

First Seneca, after him Euripides—these are the forces which moulded the modern drama. And their influence was hardly less strong upon the romantic than on the classical type. It is with the latter, however, that we are for the moment concerned. In both dramatists, as we have seen, there were romantic elements, elements which were faithfully reproduced by their modern disciples. But in both the classical strain, inherited from the older dramatists, decisively predominated. It predominated also in the general influence which they exercised upon the modern drama. For at least three centuries, the classical type was in the bulk

of Western Europe received as the only legitimate type of tragic drama. And, to a large extent, it drew the classical subject, the subject taken straight from classical mythology or classical history, in its train. Italy led the way; France followed in her steps.[1] And, being ahead of all other nations in culture, they laid down the law for the rest of Europe. As each of the other nations was brought within the pale of civilisation, it accepted, almost as a matter of course, the "legislation of Parnassus." This was true of Germany, the Norse countries, and Russia. It had bid fair to be true even of England and Spain. The genius of Cervantes, by nature an essentially romantic genius, struggled hard to impose the classical type on the drama of Spain. The talent of Sackville, the critical energies of Sidney, strove to accomplish a like result in the drama of England. In both countries the innate temper of the people, the genius of a handful of great writers, happily proved too strong for the invader. In both he was ultimately defeated with loss. But for a long time the issue hung trembling in the balance. It needed Marlowe and Shakespeare in the one country, it needed Lope de Vega and Calderon in the other, to decide the conflict. Nor can it be said that the critical mind of either

[1] The drama of Italy, however, turned directly to the Greeks; the French, like the English, mainly approached the classics through the medium of Seneca.

country was ever thoroughly convinced. Lope never concealed his contempt, as critic, for the principles which he carried out so brilliantly as dramatist. In our own country it was the same. From Sidney to Jonson, from Jonson to Milton, from Milton to Addison, there was a continuous undercurrent of protest against the new model which we can now see to constitute the chief glory of the literature of England.

Save in these two countries, the classical ideal swept everything before it. And Voltaire was abundantly justified in saying that the French drama, the classical tragedy of Corneille and Racine, and another whom he did not care actually to name, had made the round of Europe and was at home in every capital, not excepting London; while, except in their own land, the dramas of Spain and England were absolutely without honour, or rather were utterly unknown. This remained true until the third quarter of the eighteenth century was nearly run out; till a great revolution came over the literary temper of Western Europe; till Lessing and Goethe in Germany, and a band of despised rebels in France, found in Shakespeare the highest expression of the imaginative ideal which they themselves were striving to attain. The assault on the classical drama was the key to the triumph of the romantic revolt.

LECTURE VI

MODERN CLASSICAL TRAGEDY: RACINE, ALFIERI

We now turn to consider the modern classical drama, the drama which traces its source to Seneca and Euripides. In this, two figures stand out before all others: they are Racine and Alfieri. In the drama, these are the two typical products of the classical Renaissance. The work of Corneille and Voltaire is doubtless of vast importance. But there are two reasons why, in the limited time at our disposal, it is necessary to pass them over. In the first place, neither of them, purely as dramatist, can, in my opinion, claim to have shown the same genius as the two writers I have mentioned. In the second place—and this is a less disputable position—both of them mingled in their plays so many elements which, at least by courtesy, may be called romantic that the distinctly classical impression is largely done away.

For the present we confine ourselves to Racine. What exactly, we ask, does he stand for? What

precisely is the ideal by which his dramas are inspired? First and foremost, I should say, he stands for extreme simplicity, extreme concentration of plot. By this I do not mean that his plays are devoid of incident, if we may understand the word "incident" in a wide sense; that they do not abound in striking situations. On the contrary, there is hardly any dramatist—none, perhaps, except Alfieri—whose tragedies are so closely packed with emotional incidents, whose work is so elaborate a tissue of finely-wrought situations. But each one of those incidents, each one of those situations, is so carefully calculated, every turn of the action or the emotions is so cunningly devised, that it bears immediately and solely upon the main theme; that it is the main theme—the mental conflicts, the final destiny of the few leading characters—which is kept before us, to the exclusion of all else, from the first scene to the last. There are no episodes, no side-lights. The theme is turned first this way, and then that. The light is thrown first on one face of it, then on another. But it is always the same clear-cut crystal; the same conflict, the same fundamental situation, from beginning to end. There is no relief; none of these scenes which have so much bearing on character but which stand so entirely apart from the main action, the plot, with which we are familiar in the tragedies of Shakespeare.

The tragic tension is maintained at full pitch from the opening to the close.

This, I think, is the first point in which Racine stands pre-eminent. And it is a crucial point, a point of fundamental difference between the classical and the romantic drama. In this respect he goes back to the best traditions of the Greek drama, to the *Hippolytus* of Euripides; still more to such plays as the *Tyrannus* of Sophocles and the *Choephoroe* of Æschylus. And the *Tyrannus* is perhaps the only ancient tragedy which, in this point, can be placed quite on the same level as the masterpieces of Racine. The method is, no doubt, a perilous one. In inferior hands it lends itself to a mechanical manipulation of plot, to a total disregard of all human interest and human passion, which is unutterably wearisome. It does so in the weaker plays of Corneille and Voltaire; it does so, though to a less degree, in some few of the plays of Alfieri. But, in skilful hands, it secures a unity of effect, it makes a concentrated appeal to the imagination, which the romantic drama, with its more dispersive methods, its slow accumulation of scattered effects—line upon line, sample upon sample, here a little and there a little—is hardly capable of attaining. No doubt this gain goes hand in hand with an inevitable loss. To the richness and fulness of life which marks the romantic drama at its best, to the

revelation of the most secret springs of motive and character which we find in Shakespeare, to the flights of contemplation and lyric rapture which necessarily shake themselves free from the immediate circumstances of the action, which for the moment detach both speaker and audience from the trammels of time and place and fill them with "thoughts that wander through eternity," the scheme of Racine allows no room whatever. The very concentration of method bars out this wider world from the beginning.

There is a further limitation which is not perhaps inherent in the classical method, but which is no doubt closely connected with it, which from circumstances has come to be regarded as an integral part of it, and which, in the end, did more than anything else to bring it into discredit. This is the comparative absence of action in the strict sense of the term: that is, of outward incident, of all that appeals directly to the eye and physical senses of the spectator. Of inward action, of emotional incident, there is abundance; and it is Racine's chief title to supreme greatness as dramatist. But it is undoubtedly true that outward incident, incident as such, counts for little with him, for little with the classical dramatists as a body. Nearly all the action is transacted behind the scenes; it is merely reported to those concerned, or to their survivors,

by a messenger or some other supernumerary imported for the purpose. This was a tradition which had come down from the Greek stage, and it was regarded as more or less closely connected with the absurd doctrine of the unities of time and place. That, however, would not in itself account for the abhorrence of violent action—of death and murders and the like—which undoubtedly prevailed upon the French stage. Still less would it account for the same tendency upon the Greek stage, to which—as rules of binding force—the unities were unknown. In each case there was clearly a repugnance to anything in the nature of violent action, as such. It was held to disturb the calm and the dignity which were thought essential to the imaginative effect of the whole. And this feeling existed entirely apart from the laws of the unities, though their adoption, no doubt, tended to reinforce it. In any case, it was the lack of outward and visible action which eventually proved fatal to the pure model of the drama, as conceived and perfected by Racine. From the time of Voltaire onwards, the protests against it became louder and louder. They begin with the preface to *Brutus* (1730); they take practical shape in *La Mort de César* (written soon after *Brutus*, not performed till 1743), and still more in *Sémiramis* (1748). They are finally formulated in the curious *Essais* of Mercier (1773-8), a romantic

before the time, and in the resounding preface to *Cromwell* (1827). It was the plea for stirring and vivid action which ultimately struck the classical drama to the ground. And as action came in at one door, the preposterous unities made their escape through the other.

The plays of Racine, then, are marked negatively by an absence of outward action, positively by an extreme concentration of plot and passion. Within the bounds of this somewhat limited form, he is a consummate master of tragic drama. He has a profound, if not wide, knowledge of the human heart. He has supreme skill in the choice of theme. In the latter point, indeed, he has few equals and no superior. The theme he loves to take is that which brings a given group of characters into instant and violent collision. And his plot is so constructed that every turn of it shall present those characters in a new light, shall drive them to a fresh resolve, until their doom finally closes round them and they are dashed in pieces before our eyes. It is as though he had taken them and hemmed them in like wild beasts within the narrow walls of fatality, that fatality which springs from the joint action of their own passions and of circumstance. They beat themselves against the bars of their prison-house in front. They hurl themselves against the wall on this side and on that. But all is to no

avail. The barriers rapidly close in upon them, and they are crushed by a relentless doom.

So again with his portrayal of character. It is doubtless limited, and limited of set purpose, to that which has immediate bearing upon the main action of the piece. But, within these limits, it is surprisingly sure and surprisingly complete. In painting the subtle doublings and windings of the will, the fixed resolves and sudden repentances of the heart, he is—given that somewhat narrow ground —almost without a rival. His *Phèdre*, the four principal figures in *Andromaque*, surely suffice to put this beyond doubt. "Did any one ever approach this man in knowledge of the human heart?" asked Voltaire in triumph. An Englishman instinctively replies: "Yes, Shakespeare; and, what is more, surpassed him." That cannot be denied. Of the boundless wealth of Shakespeare's world, of his endless variety, of his penetration into the most secret springs of character and passion, there is no trace in Racine. There was no room for it within the limits of the type which he deliberately chose. But this must not blind us to the dramatic truth and force of that which he has to offer. Nor is it fair to forget that, to him as to the Greeks before him, the Shakespearean drama would probably have seemed to be entirely lacking in artistic unity; to be lacking also in the

calm which is necessary to the highest imaginative effects.

These, then, are the supreme qualities of Racine: his deep knowledge of human character, so far as it bears directly upon action; his power of directing the action so as to grip the given characters at close quarters, to wake the energies of their soul to the utmost intensity, to call forth the strongest instincts of their heart. The two plays in which these qualities reveal themselves most clearly are probably *Andromaque* and *Phèdre*. A slight sketch of each will serve to illustrate the general statements with which we have hitherto been concerned. Let us begin with *Andromaque* (1667).

The number of characters in this play is unusually large. There are no less than four whose participation is absolutely indispensable to the action of the whole. That action, however, is cunningly centred round two figures, those of Pyrrhus and Andromaque. In the last resort all hangs upon the will of the latter. And the conditions are such that her will is torn in two. If love for her child prevails, she will give her hand to Pyrrhus and so find protection from her enemies. If fidelity to her slaughtered husband is the stronger, she will reject Pyrrhus, and her child will be given over to certain death. To Pyrrhus she is absolutely indifferent—worse than indifferent, and with reason.

It was he who gave all her kinsmen to fire and sword; it was his father who slew her husband and mangled his lifeless corpse. Pyrrhus, on his side, is bound by every tie of interest and honour, by oaths solemnly given before the eyes of the Greek host, to wed Hermione. But he is madly in love with Andromaque, and at a word from her is ready to sacrifice everything, to defend her and Astyanax against the whole force of the Greeks. Such is the face of things when the drama opens. And the other partners to the action, Hermione and Orestes, are so placed that, by every instinct and every passion, by love, by hatred, by desire of vengeance, they are driven to fan the flames into a fury. Orestes, as the envoy of the Greeks, appears to demand the instant surrender of Astyanax. But at the sight of Hermione, his old love for her is awakened, and from that moment he sets himself to play on her frantic jealousy of Andromaque. The three others are tossed to and fro between conflicting impulses. His will alone is undivided, and his will inevitably prevails. Andromaque, cut off from all other hope, at length yields to the prayers of Pyrrhus, resolved to slay herself the moment her son's safety is assured. Hermione, maddened by mortification and jealousy, pledges Orestes to the murder of Pyrrhus. Pyrrhus, as he stands before the marriage-altar, is treacherously cut down, and Orestes returns

to find himself repudiated by a woman who had never loved him and now flies with loathing from his presence to slay herself over the body of his hated rival. The drama closes with a vision of the Furies, once more gathering round him to exact the reckoning for blood. Of the four who sustain the action of the piece, one only has nothing wherewith to reproach herself. And she has seen the hero, who staked all to save her, treacherously slaughtered at her side.

If any fault is to be found with this impetuous tragedy, it is that the plot is too elaborate and symmetrical; that it presents us with something too much in the nature of a *partie carrée*, a fatal game of whist. That, no doubt, is the danger attendant on the distinctive methods of French tragedy; it might even be said, of classical tragedy in general. And the same criticism, with others far more damaging, might be passed on *Iphigénie*. But there is at least one of Racine's dramas which escapes altogether from this charge, the last of his distinctively classical tragedies, *Phèdre* (1677).

Here we have substantially the same story as in the *Hippolytus* of Euripides and of Seneca. All that is necessary, therefore, is to record the points in which Racine has departed from his predecessors, and to ask ourselves what is the bearing of these

variations upon the general character of the whole. In the first place, then, the supernatural element, which plays so large a part in the drama of Euripides, is struck out by both the later dramatists, by the Roman no less than by the French. So far as Aphrodite is concerned, this is a clear gain. Her intervention is a disturbing element in the Greek play: disturbing because it necessarily robs Phædra of her freedom and degrades her into a tool. What Euripides gained by this was to soften the horror of her subsequent action. But the price he paid was heavy, and it remains a question whether he might not have attained his end by other and more dramatic means. The excision of Artemis is a more doubtful matter. The dramatic force, as well as the poetry, of the opening prayer of Hippolytus is incomparably great. So is the pathos of the farewell between him and the goddess at the close. Still, in a drama which aimed at being a living thing to the men of his generation, it was obviously impossible for Racine to introduce a personage of pagan mythology; and the same thing probably applies to Seneca.

The disappearance of Artemis almost inevitably transfers the character of Hippolytus to a different plane. Seneca, indeed, strives to maintain the stern temperance, the noble savagery, of the hero by

touches interwoven with the dramatic texture of the piece. But he only succeeds in making him a declamatory pedant. It may be doubted, however, if Racine does not do still worse by presenting this virgin soul, the chosen friend of the virgin goddess, as fluttered by a respectful and timid love for an insipid damsel, specially created for the purpose and armed with the inevitable confidante. And this is by far the weakest spot in the play. It is in his handling of Phèdre that he rises to his full strength. Here he drops all that is revolting in both his predecessors; he adopts all that is best in each; and trusting to the intuitions of his own genius, creates a character inexpressibly moving and inexpressibly tragic. In the opening scenes, by a perfectly just instinct, he follows in the steps of the Greek. Phèdre, like the Phædra of Euripides, is bowed down with shame at her own passion. It is against her will, it is half without her knowledge, that her secret is dragged from her by the officious curiosity of the nurse. From that point onwards, again I think by a just instinct, he takes his rough draft from Seneca. The avowal to Hippolyte is made not by the nurse, but by Phèdre herself. This is undeniably more vivid. And—given the agonies, the hesitation, and the shame, with which it is made by the heroine of Racine, though not of Seneca—it is also more dramatic, more true to

nature, and richer in illumination of character. The scene is manifestly crucial, and throughout it is managed with incomparably greater delicacy, as well as with far greater dramatic power, by Racine than by Seneca. This will be admitted by all with reference to Phèdre. But it is no less true of Hippolyte. In Seneca, beside himself with horror, he seizes the unhappy woman by the hair and draws his sword against her, only throwing it aside when she implores him to plunge it in her breast; *ne quid exores*, because the smallest compliance with her will is an abomination to him. In Racine, it is Phèdre herself who, appalled at her own confession, demands the sword at his hand, and, having received it, at once flies from his presence, resolved on instant death. So again with the subsequent incidents. In Seneca, the nurse at the first moment conceives the infamous project of slandering Hippolytus, and, after cunningly paving the way with Theseus, leaves to Phædra the task of carrying it to execution. In Racine, the slander is an afterthought, begotten of sudden panic at the unexpected return of Theseus. Phèdre, surprised into compliance, greets her husband with a few ambiguous, but none the less criminal, words. She then hurries into the palace, overcome with a double shame, and leaves to Œnone the odious work of poisoning his mind against his guiltless son. Then, with hardly a moment's pause,

comes the inevitable revulsion. She implores Theseus to revoke his curse upon Hippolyte. She is on the brink of accusing herself to save him. But, from her husband's reply, she learns for the first time of the love between Hippolyte and Aricie, and the words of truth are frozen on her lips. Left alone, she once more comes to her true self. In black despair at her own baseness, she covers Œnone with imprecations, and departs to end her life by poison. No more is seen of her until, with the hand of death upon her, she appears to declare the truth over the dead body of her step-son, and to fall in the last agony at her husband's feet. Compare all this with the closing scenes of the Latin play, and it will at once be evident that, in accepting the rough draft of Seneca, Racine has penetrated far more deeply into the windings and sudden revulsions of the human heart; that he is at once more dramatic and more truly tragic than his model. A comparison with the masterpiece of Euripides is here impossible. But, though the strictly dramatic power of Euripides, his insight into motive and passion, is probably less, yet in the grief of Artemis and in the atonement between Theseus and his deeply injured son, there is a tragic pathos—"after the storm a calm"—which nothing can surpass.

It will be seen that of the over-elaboration of

plot and outward circumstance, which may perhaps be charged upon *Andromaque*, there is nothing in *Phèdre*. The same may be said of the intermediate drama, *Britannicus* (1669), the third of the great masterpieces of Racine. Here, however, as indeed in *Phèdre*, there are other qualities which it would be unjust to pass by in silence. The character of Nero could only have come from the hand of a master. It is not only that the first dawn of a cruelty, which has since passed into a byword, is here painted with marvellous insight and subtlety. That is the part of his task which Racine seems to have laboured the most diligently, and on which he dwells with the greatest pride. But there is one scene which displays yet rarer powers: that in which Nero, himself unseen, still dominates every word and every gesture which passes between the hapless lovers. The mad jealousy, the brutal hatred of the tyrant make themselves felt in every syllable, in every pause of the dialogue, like some hideous spectre whose presence weighs heavy upon the soul, though the eye is powerless to discern it. In the power of striking horror to the heart there is no other scene like this in Racine. There are not many in other dramatists; none perhaps where the effect is wrought by means so subtle, yet so natural. Here, if anywhere, we have the unmistakable stamp of a great imagination. Something of the same

imaginative genius, though in a very different kind, may be seen in the horror which sweeps over Phèdre when she is driven to realise the full baseness of her deeds. "Where," she cries in her anguish, "shall a place be found for me? The earth is weary of me; the heavens will have none of me; if I go down to hell, the very spirits of the accursed will fly before me; and there, at the judgment-seat, I shall stand before my father, Minos, and he will shudder at the sight of his own daughter, whom he is doomed to visit with unheard-of penalties for unheard-of crimes." The whole passage is in the truest vein of poetry. It springs naturally from the despair of the speaker; and yet it lifts us into a higher region, one less trammelled and bound by the immediate action of the piece, than is common in the classical drama.

Such, then, are the most obvious characteristics of French classical tragedy, as conceived and practised by its most accomplished master. An extreme, occasionally an undue, elaboration of plot; but an elaboration in which it is never forgotten that the plot is after all but a means to an end, and that this end is to exhibit, so far as action can exhibit, certain typical characters, certain typical passions, working themselves out to their inevitable doom. All that does not directly and manifestly serve this purpose is rigidly excluded. It is right to observe,

however, that after *Andromaque* the extreme tension of the plot is in some measure relaxed, the structure of the drama somewhat loosened, and on the whole a freer scope allowed for the portrayal of character. This is perhaps true of *Britannicus*; it is certainly so of *Phèdre*. And if we except *Athalie*, which is manifestly a type by itself, it is by these three dramas that Racine must be judged.

It remains to consider briefly the style in which these plays are written. And here again we are brought very close to the heart of the classical ideal. Of the vividness and fire of Shakespeare's style, of the variety which ranges at will through the whole scale of human character and utterance, there is no spark in Racine. He would have rejected them, even if they had lain within his grasp. His is a carefully sifted, a deliberately heightened, style. And it has, naturally, the defects of its qualities. There is little, indeed, of that pinchbeck diction, that elaborate avoidance of the *mot propre*, which became so absurd in the decay of the classical drama; though an enemy might object that this is partly because the things for which the proper word stands are also rigorously banished. But to those who have been trained on the bracing boldness of the Elizabethans, such a style, one so watchfully adorned and weeded, is, no doubt, apt to seem monotonous. And in the monotony, we are liable to overlook the

extraordinary unity, grace, and harmony which undoubtedly belong to it. "Racine has perfect grace," said Joubert, "but he has not the supreme grace of Virgil." That is as near the truth as it is given to man to come. And it is, as it was meant to be, uncommonly high praise. Nor must it be forgotten that, to the tense and heightened passions of Racine, as to the tense and heightened scenes of Shakespeare, none but a heightened style would be appropriate. And if he lacks, as he does lack, the supreme touches of such Shakespearean scenes, that is not because he had a different ideal of the drama, but because he was the lesser poet. What distinguishes his general scheme from that of Shakespeare is that, with him, the *whole* drama is pitched in this exalted key. And that, no doubt, depends upon a difference of ideal. Here, as in all worthy art, form and matter are inseparable.

The unpardonable sin of Racine, in point of style, —and this has nothing to do with that which is vital or essential—is that he sinks sometimes into the jargon of the drawing-room. That the personages of a tragedy should bow and scrape to each other with *My lord* and *My lady*, that their "eyes should do famous execution" on their lovers, would in any case be bad enough.[1] But, when these personages

[1] *e.g.* Me cherchiez-vous, Madame?
Un espoir si charmant me seroit-il permis?—*And.* I. iv.—

are the titanic figures of Greek heroic legend, it is ten times worse. What have Pyrrhus and Andromache, what have Clytemnestra and Achilles, to do with the mincing *minauderies* of Versailles? Still, it is highly unjust to lay much stress on this. When all is told, it counts for extremely little in the general effect. And on the whole it remains true that, within the limits imposed by the classical ideal and the classical matter, the style of Racine is singularly noble; that it has a harmony and a unity which have seldom been surpassed. Above all, it is a style in complete accord with the matter it sets forth.

Alfieri (1749-1803), like Racine, adopts the classical mould. But there the resemblance between them may be said to cease. In matter, still more in style and treatment, the Italian presents a marked contrast to the Frenchman. Love plays a far less prominent part in his tragedies. The courtly atmosphere is swept away. The passion is yet fiercer and more tense. The language, so far from being smooth, errs, if anything, on the side of abruptness; of what Alfieri himself would have called "ferocity."

No doubt, in his plays, as in those of Racine, the presence of certain romantic elements must at once

—Mais que vos yeux sur moi se sont bien exercés!
Qu'ils m'ont vendu bien cher les pleurs qu'ils ont versés!—*Ibid.*

It is only fair to say that it would be difficult to parallel these inanities from either *Britannicus* or *Phèdre*.

be admitted. In one at least of them, *Maria Stuarda*, there are passages instinct with a lyrical genius, which stands out in sharp contrast with the abrupt severity of the tragic passion which dominates the rest. They are the passages in which John Knox, under the *alias* of Lamorre, reveals to the outraged queen the miseries which her violence is destined to bring upon the land. Such passages are, however, exceedingly rare; I doubt whether any other instance could be brought. In some of his plays, again, we may notice a tendency to avoid all action, and to centre the whole interest round the bare situation, which remains unchanged from beginning to end. And this, by something of a stretch, may perhaps fairly be reckoned as a characteristic of romance. Certainly, we shall meet it again in the romantic tragedies of the following century, notably in those of Browning and Maeterlinck. The two plays in which this tendency is most marked—and they present a glaring contrast to the rest—are *Saul* and *Mirra*. By some judges these two plays are reckoned the finest creations of Alfieri. For myself, I cannot but think that he is more at home when he adopts, as he does far more often, the purely classical type.

For, when all abatements have been made, his genius is essentially classical. It is as the last great representative of classical tragedy that he stands out.

And his supreme greatness lies in this: that, retaining the classical model in its most severe form, he gave to it an intensity of action and of passion, he breathed into his characters a fire and fury, he informed the whole with a dramatic subtlety and vividness, which were hardly to be supposed possible within those narrow limits. It is this which makes him so significant a figure in the history of the drama. Compressing his matter within an almost incredibly narrow space, and rigorously smiting off all that is not at the white heat of passion, he gives to the classical mould the utmost pitch of dramatic intensity which it is capable of receiving. The result is that, in his greatest plays, the characters are painted with such fullness and richness of colour, such subtle mastery of light and shade, as is elsewhere to be found only in the looser structure of the romantic drama; we might almost say, only in the tragedies of Shakespeare.

What is the secret of this unique effect? It may be found, I think, in three instincts, all of which are possessed by Alfieri in the highest degree, while each stands in the closest connection with the others. In the first place, his characters are of a passionate intensity which, in the classical drama at any rate, has never been approached. Secondly, he never rests until he has cast these characters into a train of action so framed as to bring them into instant and

vehement conflict. Lastly, he has an unerring eye for realising the capabilities of such a situation down to the minutest detail; so that each turn of the incidents, each fluctuation of the emotions, presents the situation in a fresh aspect; the characters, by whose conflict it is created, in an entirely new light. Something of this power we have already observed in Racine, and it is the surest source of his greatness. But few, I think, will deny that it was possessed by Alfieri in a yet greater degree, with an intensity still more fiery. This is true, above all, of the passionate vehemence of his characters. And, with him, the initial choice of characters is the determining factor in the ultimate result. With Racine, on the contrary, the situation is perhaps the first thing; and the characters are largely determined by the force of the circumstances that hem them in.

Thus with Alfieri everything depends upon the vehemence of the characters, on the volcanic force which keeps them in eruption from the first moment to the last. And when we consider the character of the dramatist himself, we shall cease to be surprised. In his *Autobiography* we have an unique record of a nature which hurled itself like a hurricane upon life, upon each object in turn that it marked out for its own. A breakneck rider, a reckless duellist in his youth, he threw the same ardour into the love and poetry, into the study and reflection, into the "fierce

and furious hatred of tyranny," whether kingly or popular, which fired his manhood. His personages are the faithful echo of the stormy resolves, the headstrong vehemence, which swayed his own heart. They are embodied wills, incarnate passions, which cleave their way through every obstacle, until they dash themselves in pieces against each other. And this is as true of the nobler, as of the baser, natures which work out their destiny upon his stage; as true of Polinice or Antigone as it is of Creonte; as true of Clitennestra or Oreste as of Egisto; as true of Carlos or Garzia as of Piero or Filippo. In good and bad alike, we have a nature charged to the muzzle with will and passion, and discharging itself flash upon flash against all who venture to cross the path of its ambitions or resolves.

Characters so strongly marked tend naturally, and in no invidious sense, to fall into certain groups or types. On the one hand we have the jealous tyrant, incapable of love, trampling on all opposition, ruthlessly crushing all who dare to thwart his designs or lift a finger against his arbitrary fiat. We have Creonte defying the laws of God and man that he may draw Antigone within his toils; we have Filippo hunting Carlos to his doom.[1] In each case tyranny, the lust of arbitrary power, is the ground-

[1] In *Antigone* and *Filippo* respectively. The first instalment of Alfieri's tragedies was published in 1783, the second in 1789.

work of the character. But in each case the original strain is crossed and deepened by one yet more degraded; by cowardice or festering hatred or insensate jealousy. In other plays we have the same type of character in the making; not yet in possession of supreme power, but plotting to attain it; securing its ends not by open violence but by a still more hateful subtlety and deceit. Such are Creonte in the earlier play where he appears, and Piero, and, above all, Egisto.[1] The last is a masterpiece of dramatic portraiture. The cunning with which, without seeming to stir a finger, he leads Clitennestra step by step to the murder of her husband is nothing short of diabolical. Had Alfieri created no other character, this alone would secure him a place among great dramatists.

On the other hand we have a group of characters essentially noble in nature, but maddened by passion and hurried by passion to their ruin. Such is Garzia; such are Oreste and Polinice; such, in a supreme degree, is Clitennestra.[2] In both plays where she appears she is painted with consummate vividness and insight. In the earlier play, the conflict between duty and lawless love, between jealousy and a lingering respect, between thirst for vengeance and the stings of conscience; in the later play, the

[1] In *Polinice* and *Don Garzia* and *Agamennone* respectively.

[2] The last in *Agamennone* and *Oreste*; the others in the plays which bear their names.

ceaseless struggle between affection and contempt for the wretched man whose heart is now laid bare before her, between love to her paramour and devotion to her son—seldom has any dramatist given so subtle a portraiture as this. Or again, we have a character of pure nobility, who defies all earthly power in defence of truth and justice, whose courage nothing can shake, who stands firm as a rock against all the tortures that hatred or jealousy can devise. There is perhaps only one character of this cast in the plays of Alfieri; and we should hardly wish for more. But the Antigone of Alfieri is not unworthy to take place beside the Antigone of Sophocles.

But, if subtlety cannot be denied to Alfieri, it is subtlety within clearly defined limits. And no one will credit him with such complexity as we find, for instance, in *Hamlet*. That, even if it had lain within his power, would have carried him altogether beyond the bounds of the classical drama. And his play of passion, surprising as it is within his appointed limits, cannot compete for a moment with that which genius can draw from the wider range and looser structure of romantic tragedy. The comparative simplicity of Alfieri's method can perhaps best be seen when we turn from his *Filippo* to the companion play, written some ten years later by Schiller. Nothing could show more plainly the essential difference between the classical and the romantic type of

tragedy. The Philip of Schiller is a strangely subtle creation. Tyranny and jealousy are, no doubt, at the root of it. But they do not exclude a certain honesty of purpose, a fitful openness to new impressions, a capacity for sudden self-questionings, for sharp returns upon his most deeply cherished policies and convictions. Hence the frenzied struggle with vile suspicions, which almost reconciles us to what is odious in his nature. Hence his submission, if it be but a momentary submission, to the masterful enthusiasm of Posa. All this may be, and is, entirely unhistorical. But that is not the point. The question is whether such a character is humanly possible, whether it is dramatically convincing, whether it finds a fitting place in the general economy of the tragedy, or no. And on all these questions the answer, I believe, is wholly favourable to Schiller. Of an utterly different cast is the Filippo of Alfieri. Of the complications imagined by Schiller he has no hint. He is the tyrannical ruler, the jealous husband and father, and he is nothing else. Indeed, odious as these features are in themselves, Alfieri has spared no pains to make them more odious yet. Filippo has not only the ruthless fury of tyranny and jealousy; he has also their treacherous cunning and their profound dissimulation. Such a character might but too easily have sunk into a mere monster, a theatrical puppet without vitality,

and without any claim upon our interest or conviction. But, harshly as the lines are drawn, the portrait is yet, I think, intensely real. And the tyrant is surrounded with such an atmosphere of terror that, even when absent, his figure still seems to dominate the stage; his will to lurk in every word and every action of his victims. We have here something of the same genius that we have already noticed in the *Britannicus* of Racine. Now to an effect of this particular kind it is clear that a simple presentment of character is indispensable. It was so with the Clytemnestra of Æschylus; it was so with the Nero of Racine; it is so once more with Alfieri's Filippo. And that a like effect could be brought about by the more elaborate methods of romantic drama is almost inconceivable.

Yet within the limits which he had marked out for himself—limits which are indeed of the essence of classical tragedy—the methods of Alfieri are, as I have said, by no means incompatible with subtlety of portraiture. On the contrary, that subtlety is often surprisingly great. This cannot surely be denied of Clitennestra and Egisto, nor of Eteocle and Polinice, nor of Creonte as he is painted in *Antigone*.

As we saw, however, it is not only in the choice and conception of his characters that Alfieri excels. He is great also in his moulding of the situation, in his marshalling of the circumstances which reveal

them and call them out. In no dramatist is the action so closely serried. In none is the situation so clearly and minutely thought out. In none does it press the characters at such close quarters, or cut more deeply into the quick of their energies and passions. The best examples of this are probably *Polinice* and *Oreste*. The storm that tears the breast of the two brothers, so like yet so different, in the one, the conflict which rends the soul of Clitennestra in the other, are painted with such a mastery of detail, such command of light and shade, of the shifting emotions which each turn and counter-turn of the circumstances must excite, as have seldom been equalled in the whole history of the drama. Such scenes—and they are prolonged almost through the whole length of the tragedy—are the ripest fruit of his genius. And with the compactness of plot, the close structure, which marks the classical type of tragedy, they combine something of the fullness and complexity of motive which is characteristic of romance.

It remains only to say a word as to the sources from which he habitually drew his subjects, and as to the relation between his matter and his style. As to the first point, the two fields in which he is most at home are the heroic legends of Greece, and, in a less degree, the stormy history of the courts of Italy and Spain. Two of his best tragedies, *Don Garzia*

and *Filippo*, are drawn from the latter. The rest, almost without exception, from the former. No other field could have offered so free a scope for his genius, for no other is so rich in those violent passions to which he naturally turned. At the same time, he displays the utmost freedom in his handling of such stories. He moulds his material imperiously to his own purposes. In so doing, he followed in the steps of the Greek tragedians themselves; it may even be said that he bettered their instruction. The clearest example of this is to be found once more in his handling of Clytemnestra, whose character, motives, and fate all present a startling departure from anything to be found in the Greek tragedians; nor is there more than a hint of it in Seneca. In *Agamennone* she is entirely under the spell of a mad passion for Egisto, who, apparently without one spark of love for her, cunningly eggs her on to the murder of her husband; and, that once accomplished, at once lays plots, but in vain, for the destruction of her children. In *Oreste*, the eyes of the unhappy woman have long been opened to the baseness of her accomplice. But neither baseness nor outrages are of any avail against her infatuation. She is torn asunder between that infatuation and remorse for the murder of her husband—between her passion for Egisto and her love for the son whose one purpose is to slay him. And in the end, by a tragic irony,

she is herself slain by Oreste as she vainly strives to save the wretched coward for whom she has sacrificed both honour and conscience. Oreste, blinded by fury, is utterly unconscious that he has shed his mother's blood. When consciousness returns, he is beside himself with despair. Among many departures from all forms of the original tradition, the last is perhaps the most startling. And it is manifestly dictated by the sense that, if the story was to be a living thing to the modern imagination, not a mere antiquarian revival, such a change was a necessity. And the same, though in a less degree, is probably true of the other alterations. Certainly the general effect of them all is to bring both characters and incidents more or less into accord with the moral sense of the present. Can it seriously be doubted that the dramatist was justified?

Severity, as we have seen, is the general characteristic of these tragedies—severity of conception and severity of execution. It is no less the characteristic of their style. Few styles are so concise, so serried as Alfieri's; few are so bare of adornment. It would be hard to find a single simile in his tragedies. Even metaphors, vivid when they occur, are comparatively scarce. Such a thing as "amplification" is almost unknown. Each thought is compressed into the narrowest compass; each follows a natural turn of the passion or emotion; each

succeeds the other with the rapidity of lightning. Sometimes, it must be admitted that this is carried to affectation. One of the acts of *Antigone* opens with the following duel between the heroine and Creonte: "Thy choice?"—"'Tis made."—"Hæmon?"—"No, death."—"'Tis thine";[1] five speeches in the course of a single line; a "staircase," as Hazlitt sarcastically describes a similar, but not equal, extravagance in Ford. But such aberrations are rare. And on the whole it will probably be admitted that the style of Alfieri is both singularly striking in itself and singularly in harmony with the matter and spirit which it embodies. When we consider the enormous difficulties with which he had to contend, when we remember that the very language in which he wrote had to be learnt in the first instance as a foreign language, it is difficult to set bounds to our admiration. His very sententiousness is, more often than not, in the service of his dramatic genius. "Lord of the world, what yet doth fail thee?—Peace."[2]—where shall we find a more dramatic opening to a tragedy than this?

Here we must take leave of the last great classical dramatist; the last, it may well be, who is ever likely

[1] Scegliesti?
Ho scelto.
Emone?
Morte.
L'avrai.—*Antigone*, act iv.

[2] Signor del mondo, che ti manca?—Pace.—*Ottavia*, act i.

to appear. If any criticism is to be made upon his dramas, it is that they are too dramatic; that they are more closely packed with matter than their narrow limits will well bear; that they lay too great a burden upon the genius of the actor and the capacities of the spectator. Where, one is tempted to ask, is the spectator who could stand the strain of passions so violent, let loose to buffet each other from the first scene to the last? Where is the actor whose genius could rise to demands so intense and long sustained? But this, if it be a fault, is at least a fault on the right side; if an error, at least a noble one. For it springs from the determination of the dramatist to sacrifice everything to what, after all, is the noblest end the dramatist can seek; the portrayal of character in all its windings; the presentment of passion in all its intensity; if we may use a word which Alfieri himself uses in a like connection, in all its "ferocity."

LECTURE VII

ROMANTIC TRAGEDY: SHAKESPEARE

We pass now from the classical to the romantic drama; from one great type of tragedy to its opposite. It is true that classical tragedy had undergone many modifications since it left the hands of Æschylus and Sophocles. It is true that many of what may fairly be called romantic elements had been introduced by Euripides and Seneca; that they hold their own, to some degree, even in so convinced a classicist as Racine. It is true, on the other side, that the influence of Seneca was a great, perhaps the dominant, influence upon the romantic predecessors of Shakespeare, and indeed upon Shakespeare himself, no less than on their classical rivals. But, for all that, it cannot be denied that the difference between the romantic and the classical type proclaims itself at the first glance; and that in no two writers is that contrast more strongly marked than it is between Racine and Shakespeare.

The contrast appears, first and foremost, in the amount of action, of outward incident, admitted by the one dramatist and the other. Racine, as we have seen, is to the last degree sparing in this matter. Everything in the shape of violent action is jealously excluded. As Hugo complained, it is only the "elbows of action" that appear upon his stage; the hand that strikes the blow, the heart that bleeds from it, are laboriously hidden. And when the romantic revolt at last began, the first cry was invariably for more, and more vivid, action. On this point, though in practice he lacked the courage of his convictions, Voltaire was hardly less emphatic than Hugo himself. How different is the stage of the Elizabethans! From the first scene to the last it is alive with action. Nothing is left to relation. Everything is presented to the eye. And in spite of obvious abuses, this was a healthy instinct. The eye will not be satisfied with hearing. It demands, and rightly demands, to see as well. Aristotle had felt this from the beginning; and few passages of the *Poetics* are more striking, few bear stronger witness to his sagacity and detachment, than those in which he asserts the claims of the spectacular element in tragedy. Even Horace, though his authority did more perhaps than any thing else to sanction the banishment of action, had fitful glimmerings of the truth:—

Segnius irritant animos demissa per aures
Quam quæ sunt oculis subjecta fidelibus.

Yet, in spite of these protests from within the camp, the classical tyranny maintained itself unbroken. And it was only the reckless unconventionality of the Elizabethans and the Spaniards which had the power to overthrow it. It may be readily admitted that the revolt was not seldom carried to excess. In some of the Elizabethans, both early and late, the action is too much akin to melodrama. In Dryden —and there are many earlier instances too—it is apt to degenerate into sound and fury, into mere empty bustle and noise. Even in Shakespeare, it has a habit of defeating its own ends; of bringing upon the stage things which, with the appliances of the stage, can only look farcical and absurd; battles, for instance, where the armies of two great kingdoms, as Addison said, are represented by "a pair of scene-shifters and a couple of candle-snuffers." Such scenes, however, occur mainly in the *Histories*, which are necessarily of looser build, and must obviously be judged by their own laws.

Apart from these, there is a class of incident which is freely admitted to the Shakespearean stage, but which to Racine would have seemed an abomination. These are the murders and sudden deaths which, at the close of *Hamlet* and other tragedies, leave the stage fairly choked with corpses. "Look

on the tragic loading of this bed," says Lodovico at the end of *Othello*. And the same words, with slight variations, would apply to almost any other of the great tragedies. Here an English taste will find nothing to complain of, though a Frenchman would be apt to feel very differently. On the whole, it would seem that the gain of admitting such action far outweighs all possible drawbacks. For not only is it natural that such deeds should take place on the scene, and in the heat, of the passions which provoke them; but, as Horace himself saw, they make a far deeper impression on the imagination when presented to the eye than when merely reported to the ear. And, after all, they are just the deeds which, in the outward sense at any rate, constitute the tragedy. Moreover, the devices on which the classical dramatists are driven in their efforts to sweep them into the side-scenes are uncommonly clumsy; and the Messenger's speech, with its arrest of action and its inevitable tendency to rhetorical description, is one of the least tolerable things in the classical drama, ancient as well as modern. In the main, then, we may say that Shakespeare is abundantly justified in his prodigality of action. Certainly, he is not less, but more scrupulous on the point than many of his fellow Elizabethans. A glance at the *Spanish Tragedy* and the *Jew of Malta*, or, to take later instances, at the *Duchess of Malfi*, and one at

least of the great tragedies of Ford, will suffice to put this beyond doubt. There is, however, one incident in Shakespeare which most readers will surrender without a pang. This is the tearing out of Gloucester's eyes in *Lear*. The mere physical repulsion, the sickening horror, of such a sight is enough to condemn it. But when all allowance has been made for such excesses, it surely remains true that the demure inaction of the classical drama is well replaced by the fire and vividness of the Elizabethan and the Spanish.

We pass now to a matter where the contrast between the classical and the romantic drama is still more significant, and its consequences still more deep-reaching. No one who compares a tragedy of Racine with one of Shakespeare's—*Othello* is, perhaps, a partial exception—can fail to notice that the latter is far looser in its general structure than the former. And this is as true—it is, in fact, still more true—of the Elizabethans in general. But, for convenience' sake, the following remarks will be mainly confined to Shakespeare. With him the drama is no longer limited to the main action, the single situation. Its scope is far wider; the range it includes far richer and more varied. There *may* be a secondary action. There are sure to be episodes, side-lights, by-scenes, where the action stands still, but where those strains of character which do not and cannot come to the surface

in the main action, or indeed in any action at all, are thrown into relief. We take each of these points singly; and first, the admission of a secondary action.

No doubt, in the hands of the less skilful writers, this practice is liable to abuse. In the noblest of Middleton's tragedies, for instance, *The Changeling*, the imaginative effect of the main action comes near to being lost—it is certainly much weakened—by the insertion, at regular intervals, of a side-action entirely independent of it, entirely detached from it, and entirely alien from it in character and temper. Here the two plots are simply cut neatly into slips and laid alongside of each other; no attempt is made to bring the one into any sort or kind of vital connection with the other. Such, however, is not Shakespeare's way of working. In one only of his tragedies, *King Lear*, does he admit a secondary action at all, though in his comedies he does so more often than not. And in that one tragedy, the story of Gloucester and his sons is so interwoven with that of Lear and his daughters that it would be impossible to sever the two without destruction to the whole drama. Nor is the connection simply that of incidents and personages. The minor action, if we may call it so, is, in idea and substance, an echo of the main action. And in the cunning brutality of Edmund we have a reverberation of the "dog-hearted" cruelty of Goneril and Regan. Thus, what

might have destroyed the unity of the piece serves only to strengthen and enhance it. The imaginative effect, so far from being weakened, is made more intense.

So also with those scenes which, though they involve no secondary action, yet stand manifestly apart from the plot and the main business of the tragedy. Such are the scenes with the players and the grave-diggers in *Hamlet*; the scene between Lear and Edgar, the real and the assumed madman, on the heath; the scene between Desdemona and Iago on the quay at Cyprus; and, if we interpret the term "main action" at all rigorously, the sleep-walking scene in *Macbeth*. In all these the action halts, or rather is deliberately suspended. In all it is replaced by talk; talk which, in every case but the last, has little or no reference to the plot. Yet in all a searching light is thrown upon the characters; and the plays would have been quite infinitely poorer without them. Can any one honestly say that he would know so much about the character of Hamlet, its inward strength and its inward weakness, that he would understand so well the causes of his action or his inaction, if the scenes in question were cut out? Or the characters of Desdemona and Iago? Or that of Lady Macbeth? Or the sublime tenderness which lies hid behind the ungovernable passion of Lear? To maintain any of these things would surely be impossible.

Yet again, there are scenes which seem to have no bearing either upon character or action; to stand there simply and solely for their imaginative effect. The most famous instance of this, and perhaps the only certain and complete one, is the Porter-scene in *Macbeth*. It is obvious that neither action nor character is here in question. But what other means would have served so well to drive home to our imagination the infinite horror of the deed which has just been done almost before our eyes? Could anything have thrown into such sharp relief the tragedy of the hellish passions let loose above, as the cynical comedy of the half-drunken churl below? the roysterer who, even as he speaks, has become, not in jest but in grim earnest, the "porter of hell-gate"?

Now it does not need much reflection to show us that—whether they serve merely to make an appeal to our imagination, or to throw light on character and temperament, or to introduce a distinct and secondary thread of action—all such scenes would infallibly have been barred out by the classical tradition. There is not one of them which does not violate the "unity of action," as it was understood not only by such critics as Aristotle or Horace, but, what is far more important, by dramatists such as Æschylus, Sophocles, and Racine. It is clear, therefore, that we have here nothing short of a revolution in the whole conception of tragic drama.

And, as those scenes which let us into the secrets of character and motive are manifestly the most significant among those we have considered, it is also clear wherein exactly that revolution consists. The ideal of Aristotle, which was also the practice of the classical dramatists, has been entirely reversed. The plot, which with them held the first place, is now thrust down into the second. Character, which had been the subordinate interest, is now treated as the principal. By the ancients character was regarded as the means, and plot as the end. With Shakespeare character becomes the end, and plot sinks into the position of the means. The centre of gravity has been shifted from plot to character. And character has come to have an independent and intrinsic value of its own.

We have seen an earnest of this revolution in the works of the ancients themselves; under one form in Sophocles, under another in Euripides. We have seen the principle carried still further by Racine, and further yet by Alfieri. And seeing that the drama, on any showing, is a presentation of human life, seeing that of all the conditions which go to make the web of human life and human destiny character is beyond comparison the most important, it is a principle which, so long as any vitality remains to the drama, is bound to assert itself and extend itself. But, so long as the classical form was the accepted mould in

which all tragedy was cast, so long it was inevitable that plot should play a commanding, if not a preponderating part. And so long as it did so, it was impossible that character should come by its full rights. The rigid mould had to be broken up; the structure of the plot had to be loosened. Then, and then only, was it possible to obtain a free scope for the portrayal of character. To break down the barriers, to employ the free space, thus opened, for the noblest ends which the drama can achieve—this was the glory of the romanticists in England and Spain. It was—so far as the latter point is concerned—the glory, above all, of Shakespeare.

The principle was applied in a variety of ways. Of these, we must content ourselves with the most obvious. And, in the first place, no one can fail to notice the weight given by Shakespeare to that which is the highest, and at the same time the most tragic, quality of character, its capacity for growth or decay. In two of his tragedies, *Macbeth* and *Lear*, this may be said to form the point round which the whole is centred. In *Macbeth* this is sufficiently obvious. Two wills, each cast in an entirely different mould, are suddenly dazzled by hopes before which the purest conscience might have wavered. Both have a touch of heroism. The man has the heroism of great physical courage—"I dare do all that may become a man"—and of a name hitherto honoured and

unsullied; the woman, the heroism of a commanding temper and dauntless resolution. Both give way to ambition; they join hands in an unpardonable crime. The life of both is for ever poisoned by the deed. But the poison works in utterly different ways. The woman, who before the deed had been all fire and determination, breaks down directly the strain of prompt decision is taken off. The remainder of the action sweeps by her, a helpless witness of her partner's crimes. In the closing scene, we see her once more, now a hopeless wreck, her whole being absorbed in the memory of the fatal moment, which was "to all her nights and days to come" to have "given solely sovereign sway and masterdom," and which has ended thus. It is quite otherwise with the man. The deed which came on him irresolute, leaves him "whole as the marble, founded as the rock." To the first murder he had nerved himself only by a dead effort, only when "chastised by the valour of a woman's tongue." In the others he has no qualm. He accepts them as his doom. He moves on to each in turn with the force and precision of a machine. But, none the less, his soul is poisoned, and his peace is departed from him. He is a hunted creature; alone in a world of curses; stripped of everything save the will to do evil, and the knowledge that, with the evil, will come its own punishment of self-torture and despair. So his doom closes

round him, and he dies at last, like "a bear tied to the stake," fighting with desperate courage against a world in arms; the same world from which he had "bought golden opinions" before his trial came and found him wanting.

The reverse of the picture is given in *Lear*. Like Macbeth, Lear is one man at the opening of the tragedy and another at its close. At the opening, he is rash, choleric, swept by gusts of ungovernable fury. But trouble, the direct consequence of his own rashness, falls upon him and hurls him not only from his throne but from his former self. He is purified by suffering. In his own sorrows he learns to feel the sorrows of mankind. He bows himself in passionate repentance, to seek forgiveness of those he has wronged and who yet love him and would give all to save him. The old world, the old self, have fallen from him. He lives now in a world where all things are made new, and where, as "God's spy," he mocks at the earthly pomp which once had been his pride; now, in a truer sense than when he used the words, "every inch a king." And if a fit of the old wilfulness once again comes on him, it is to take vengeance on the ruffian who murders her whom he had once cast from him with contempt. The old self survives in the new, the "one touch of nature" which binds him more closely than ever to our hearts.

Now it is perfectly clear that we have nothing like this in the classical dramatists. And the reason is plain. So long as the unity of time, even in its laxest form, is a condition of tragedy, so long any growth or deterioration of character—except in so far as the past may be reflected in the action of the present[1]—is impossible. Time is essential to this; and time is just what the classical drama obstinately refuses to give. And if it be true that even in the romantic drama the thing is strangely rare, that besides Shakespeare but few romantic dramatists have attempted it, that is not because of any outward conditions, it is not due to any obstacle imposed by the dramatic form, but either to lack of genius or its diversion into other channels. Still it must not be forgotten that in one at least of Calderon's tragedies, *Amar despues de la Muerte*, the same theme is taken; nor that in the most famous of all modern dramas, Goethe's *Faust*, it is carried out with triumphant success.

The defiance of the other external unity, that of place, cuts, no doubt, less deep. But it, too, is of great importance. It allows the dramatist a far greater freedom in his choice both of incidents and personages than would otherwise have been possible. And the shifts to which the classical dramatists are driven in their frantic efforts to

[1] As is repeatedly the case in the plays of Ibsen, who observes the unity of time more or less closely; e.g. *Ghosts* or *Rosmersholm*.

preserve this unity are in themselves sufficient to condemn it. On the other hand, if we turn to the tragedies of Shakespeare, we see at once what is gained by its violation. What would *Lear* be without the scene on the heath? or *Hamlet* without those on the platform and in the grave-yard? or *Othello* without the guard-room and Desdemona's chamber, or *Macbeth* without the blasted heath and the witches' cave? Not to mention that most of these scenes permit the introduction of personages—the witches, for instance—who, given the unity of place, must inevitably have been excluded.

That character should now be presented as a thing capable of growth is, then, one of the things which mark the change both of form and spirit that came over the drama with the triumph of romance. But there is another, still more significant and still more worthy of attention. This is the blending of reflection with the more active energies, which stamps the romantic drama in general and the tragedies of Shakespeare in particular. It appears in some of the greatest plays of Calderon; for instance, *La Vida es Sueño*. It appears in *Faust*. It appears, above all, in the soliloquies of Shakespeare. Here again the action is for the moment suspended, nay, forgotten; and that, it may be, at the most critical moment of its course. Take, for instance, the best known of all reflective speeches, the soliloquy of Hamlet. The

hero has just taken the resolution on which his subsequent action, or inaction, is absolutely to depend. He has designed the test which is to put the guilt or innocence of his enemy to the proof. The moment before he has been all fire and eagerness over this device. Now all is forgotten. He enters entirely wrapt up in other thoughts. "Will the scheme fail or will it prosper?"—that is what we should have expected. Not in the least. "To be, or not to be?"—to put an end to himself, or no?—that is the question that now absorbs every energy of his soul. And the same preoccupation, the weariness of life and the fascination of the mystery of death, runs through the poignant dialogue with Ophelia, which follows. So, in truth, to the very end of the tragedy. It is the inner, rather than the outer, life of Hamlet; his reflection, rather than his deeds; his inaction, rather than his action, which is the true theme of the drama. Yes, it may be objected, and just for that reason it is not a fair instance to take. The character of Hamlet is so abnormal that it could only be presented by exceptional means. This is true. But the fact remains that, for the subject of his masterpiece, Shakespeare took a theme which could not possibly have found a place in classical tragedy, and that, in his hands, the end abundantly justified the means.

Moreover, the same objection cannot possibly be

urged in the case of his other tragedies. Yet there too, doubtless under a different form, the same method reappears. It is hardly less characteristic of *Lear*, *Macbeth*, or even *Othello*, than it is of *Hamlet*. On *Lear*, which is avowedly a play of suffering rather than of action, it is unnecessary to dwell; though, once again, the mere choice of such a subject is intensely significant. *Othello*, at first sight, may seem to offer no confirmation of the point now under consideration. None of Shakespeare's heroes is less reflective in temper; to none is so little of anything even distantly approaching to soliloquy assigned; and what little there is bears directly and obviously upon the action of the moment. Yet in the great speeches of Othello we have, if not reflection, at any rate the lyric note in its highest possible intensity. And the lyric note has this in common with reflection, that it raises the soul of the speaker far above the mere purposes and circumstances of the moment. It exalts him to a region of which the actual world, its passions and sufferings, are but a pale and fleeting image, to the region which is his true home, which abides when all that he has loved and striven for in this world is torn from him or dashed in pieces. Nothing, therefore, could serve to bring out more strongly, to press more closely home upon our imagination, that innate heroism, that largeness of soul, which is the seal of

Shakespeare's tragic figures, and of none more than of Othello, "once so good," now

> Fallen in the practice of a damned slave,

a "demi-devil," who has had the cunning to "ensnare him, soul and body." And that is the reason why such lyric outbursts as

> Never, Iago! Like to the Pontic sea,

or,

> Had it pleased heaven to try me with affliction,

or,

> Put out the light, and then—put out the light,

or,

> If heaven would make me such another world
> Of one entire and perfect chrysolite,
> I'd not have sold her for it——

have power to move us to the very depth of our soul.

But, after all, the most striking of all illustrations is to be drawn from *Macbeth*. Here is a subject which only the highest genius could have made available for the purposes of art. But for the instinctive sureness of Shakespeare's touch, we should probably have felt for the hero nothing but horror and repulsion. By what means does Shakespeare check this repulsion? By what means does he convert it into interest, pity, and admiration? It is not only that from the first he makes us feel that both hero and heroine have something above the common in their nature; that they are cast in a

larger mould than the men and women among whom we habitually move; that their powers, both for good and evil, are greater; that their passions are stronger and more masterful than those of ordinary clay. This would apply equally to Richard III.; and there is no reader but will feel that Macbeth and his wife move upon a higher plane than their earlier prototype, and that their story has a far deeper tragic appeal than his. Where, then, does the difference lie? Partly, no doubt, in the atmosphere of the appalling and the supernatural with which Shakespeare has surrounded the whole action from first to last. Yet more in the amazing fidelity and minuteness with which he has traced every deed to its conflicting motives; every purpose from its first dim conception to its final accomplishment and its remotest effects upon the soul and conscience; every hesitation, every revulsion in the fatal march of crime; every contortion of the victim, self-doomed for ever

> On the torture of the mind to lie
> In restless ecstasy,

crushed beneath the consciousness of its own defilement and degradation. Most of all, perhaps, in the lyric outbursts which are nowhere so abundant as in this gloomiest and most despairing of human tragedies. It is surely intensely significant that one of the deepest reflections on the vanity of human

life and human effort, and by far the most impassioned to be found in Shakespeare should be placed on the lips of a criminal, red with the blood of murder, and at the moment when he might seem to have lost all sense of the bond which unites him to other men, to have retained nothing save the blind instinct of the hunted beast.

The significance of such passages, the impress they give to the whole spirit and substance of the tragedies in which they occur, is hardly to be exaggerated. They carry us into a world that lies far apart from, and far above, the direct action, the immediate surroundings of the speaker. Yet there are no passages which let us so deeply into the hidden springs of character; none which so powerfully serve to enforce the end and purpose of tragedy, as the dramatist conceived it; to quicken and deepen our sense that the whole man is something greater than his actual achievement; that, in his deepest abasement as in his highest exaltation, he has "thoughts which can ne'er be packed into the narrow act"; that the heroism of the hero will shine through the darkest or most distorted deed in which he has imprisoned it; that he is not at the mercy of his success or failure in the purposes, perverted or noble, which he would seem to have staked all on attaining. Beyond the action however engrossing, beyond the

passion however intense, there is an inner region into which the soul withdraws herself and is alone; where the noble spirit is brought face to face with the beauty and purity for which in this life it seeks in vain; where the perverse or the criminal, if a spark of heroism still lingers in his breast, is confronted with the truth and justice which he has defied and trampled on in this life and is forced "even to the teeth and forehead of his faults to give in evidence," to confess the emptiness and the ugliness of that which he has lost all to win. So it is that to Macbeth, racked by the torture of his own memories,

> Life's but a walking shadow . . . a tale
> Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
> Signifying nothing.

To Hamlet, tossed to and fro between thought and action, buffeted by the thousand natural shocks that flesh is heir to, death is a "sleep, a consummation devoutly to be wished." For Othello, wielding the "sword of justice," the relentless purpose half breaks as he gazes on his victim, and he stoops to kiss her as she sleeps. Then, when his eyes are at length opened, there is nothing for him but to seek refuge in death; and once again he kisses her as he falls, self-slain, at her side :—

> I kissed thee, ere I killed thee. No way but this,
> Killing myself to die upon a kiss.

No other dramatist has seen so clearly the double life of the soul. None has held the scales so evenly between the two worlds which contend for her possession. None has grasped so unerringly the tragedy, so bitter and so ennobling, which springs from their collision.

There is yet another aspect of the reflective and lyrical passages of Shakespeare on which we may pause for a moment. That is their more formal aspect, the purely poetical purpose which they serve in the general economy of his tragedies. In such passages it is fair to say that we have some equivalent for the purely lyrical episodes, the choric interludes, of the Greek drama. The Chorus of Greek tragedy has, almost inevitably, failed to find a place in the modern drama. It is too alien from modern conditions; and the attempts to introduce it, or something distantly approaching to it, have seldom been successful. In that form, we may take it, the lyric element is no longer available for dramatic uses. And the question arises: Is it possible to find some other embodiment for it, to discover some imaginative equivalent? Now, in the classical drama of the moderns, bound as it has commonly been within the limits of a highly concentrated action, it is seldom that the spirit of poetry, as such, can disengage itself; seldom that the purely lyrical element can win its flight, even for a moment, from the cage of cunningly

woven plot or the pressure of circumstances and situation. The passionate anguish of Phèdre may be cited as an exception; but it is an exception that stands almost alone. In the romantic drama, with its looser structure and its wider range of passion and feeling, the case is different. Witness, on the one hand, the lyric outbursts of Calderon; on the other, the soliloquies and the often essentially lyrical dialogue of Shakespeare. Here, if anywhere, is to be found the equivalent of which we are in search. And it is significant that, while in the Greek drama, the choric ode was a thing quite apart from the general movement of the piece, in the romantic drama, above all in that of Spain and England, the lyrical element is part and parcel of the dramatic structure; bone of its bone, and flesh of its flesh; in the strictest sense, the most dramatic thing in it; the element which, more than any other, reveals the deepest springs of character and embodies the specifically tragic appeal to the imagination.

But the loosening of the general structure in romantic tragedy has further consequences yet. And one of these is so far-reaching that, even in this cursory view, we are not entitled to overlook it. This is the enormous widening of the dramatic range which it carries with it; the infinite variety of human character which it admits. That is, perhaps, the first thing to strike us in the dramas of

Shakespeare as contrasted with those of Sophocles or Racine. And there is no need to dwell on its significance. There is, however, one special point on which we may linger for a moment. The classical drama confines itself to the serious side of life; the romantic includes the grotesque and the humorous as well. And the surest way, perhaps, to realise the importance of this is to remind ourselves that, in the French revival of 1830, it formed the battle-ground between the romantic and the classical armies. A glance at the preface to *Cromwell* will put this beyond doubt. And, however little the author of that manifesto may have succeeded in naturalising the humorous, or even the grotesque, in his own dramas, he was abundantly justified in his contention that it is one of the marks which serve most clearly to distinguish the romantic from the classical type of tragedy.

Roughly speaking, it may be said that in romantic tragedy the grotesque, the humorous, takes two distinct forms, a higher and a lower. In the lower shape, it is simply laid alongside of the more serious theme, and little or no attempt is made to blend them, or give them organic unity. An extreme instance of this is found in Middleton's *Changeling*. Here there are two distinct plots, one serious, the other comic; and between them there is absolutely no connection. The result is a tragedy with a

succession of comic interludes interspersed at stated intervals. And the effect is in the last degree baffling to the imagination. In the Spanish drama we have something of the same method, but turned to issues far more legitimate. Here the humorous element is embodied in personages—generally servants, or *graziosos*—who fill a natural part in the serious action of the piece. But the comic scenes are studiously held apart from the tragic; as often as not they offer a sort of burlesque mimicry of the tragic circumstances, the tragic passions, which form the main theme of the play. And this holds true—the burlesque apart—of Shakespeare's earlier effort to unite the humorous with the tragic; the scene in *Romeo* where Capulet storms in the kitchen, while Juliet lies to all appearance dead in the chamber above. In the later tragedies his method is very different. And here we come to the highest form which the union of tragedy and humour can take. Here the two elements are, in the strictest sense, fused and blended with each other. The sorrow is thrown into relief by the laughter; the jest of the clown or fool only serves to make the tragedy more poignant. The scene of the porter in *Macbeth*, the scene between Hamlet and the gravediggers, above all the scenes between the King and the Fool in *Lear*, are the supreme instances of this. And nowhere does the genius of Shakespeare rise more triumphantly than here.

All sides of life are represented in the matter of Shakespeare's tragedies. All sides of human character are reflected in his style. Who has not felt the marvellous variety of his style, the unflagging ease with which he passes from one style to another, in obedience to the mood or character of the speaker? The speech of Hamlet is not the speech of Macbeth; the speech of Macbeth is not that of Lear or of Othello. The language of Iago is not that of Edmund; the language of Horatio not that of Banquo or of Kent. Passing, as he did, whenever he was truly himself, into the inmost soul of each character in turn, by an unprompted instinct Shakespeare fell upon the speech appropriate to each. And few things in his dramas are more remarkable than the infinite range of style, speech, dialect they unfold before us. In no one play is this so clearly seen as in *Othello*. There he comes nearer to the common circumstances of life than in any other of his tragedies. And this is clearly reflected in the style. From the pure colloquial, the cynical brutality, of Iago—in the earlier scenes almost every phrase bites into the memory — to the fiery indignation of Emilia at the close, from the moving wail of Desdemona to the passionate anguish and the no less passionate repentance of Othello, he seems to sweep the whole scale in which human baseness and human nobility can find utterance.

Here, then, once more we come back to the battle of classicism and romance—a battle as sharply waged in the field of style as it is in that of substance and of treatment. The variety of Shakespeare's style, its daring transitions from gay to grave, from sublime to familiar, would have seemed to Racine a profanation of the drama. To those who have entered into the spirit of Shakespearean tragedy the sustained harmony of Racine will inevitably seem monotonous. The diffused glow of Racine, the lights and shadows of Shakespeare, these represent two contrary ideals, and between the two there is no possibility of compromise. Each has its own legitimate effect; but the two are mutually exclusive. And few will now be found to deny that the ideal of Shakespeare is a wider ideal, and the effect of his style a more dramatic effect, than those which were sought and found by Racine. The variety of his style, however, is but the outward and visible sign of the endless variety of his theme. And that is the secret of its importance. It is because he had scanned life and character so widely that he has grasped their significance so clearly. It is because he had sounded the depths of the soul more deeply than any other man that he touches our imagination more strongly, and grips our heart-strings with more power.

LECTURE VIII

ROMANTIC TRAGEDY: CALDERON

In England, as we have seen, the romantic drama had to fight its way inch by inch against the prestige of the classical tradition. And had it not been for the romantic elements in Seneca, who offered a meeting ground between the two hostile camps, it may be doubted whether the victory would have been so speedily won. At the other end of Europe the same struggle was waged, and the supremacy of the classical ideal yet more violently challenged.

In this, as in other matters, Spain asserted herself against the rest of Europe. Here the dramatic revival declared itself earlier than in any country with the possible exception of Italy; and declared itself unequivocally in the form of romance. This was before the end of the fifteenth century; and the drama in question was the famous *Celestina*, a fantastic story, but vivid to the point of realism, of witchcraft and love potions; a story which is indeed little more than a romance, or novel, cast

in a dramatic shape. This, however, was an isolated phenomenon. And the full birth of the drama was delayed in Spain, as in most other countries, till the middle of the following century. In the interval the romantic leaven had been silently working, and from the first moment that the drama fairly took shape it was sufficiently clear that the romantic type was likely to prevail. Yet even in Spain the victory was not won without a struggle. And it is significant that the greatest Spaniard of the age, a man of romantic genius if there ever was one, set himself, so far as might be, to stem the torrent and uphold the claims of the classical ideal. The *Numancia* of Cervantes (1583) is not without romantic elements. But the classical spirit is unmistakably predominant; and the author of *Don Quixote*, it is true with an ill grace, is here seen fighting on the side of Trissino and of Sackville. But the whole genius of his country was against him. In no people had chivalry taken so firm a root; in none had circumstances and passions, political and religious, done so much to interweave the ideals of chivalry with the national character. The point of honour was the life-blood of the Spaniard; his very instincts had taken the ply of fantasy and romance. Thus the romantic type of drama was the only one which could reflect the genius of the country. And with the coming

of Lope de Vega (c. 1585), its triumph was assured.

The flowering time of the Spanish drama may be placed in the hundred years from 1580 to 1680; and its two greatest names are Lope de Vega and Calderon. The life of the former (1562-1635) includes the whole period of the Elizabethan and Jacobean drama in England. That of the latter (1600-1680) covers the whole life of Milton, with a margin of six or seven years at either end, together with the whole dramatic careers of Corneille, Dryden, Molière, and Racine. It is a great space in the literary annals of mankind, and brilliantly was it filled by these two dramatists. Of Lope it is impossible to speak on this occasion. Time forbids, and moreover his supreme field was rather comedy than tragedy. We confine ourselves to Calderon.

The first thing to strike us as we turn his pages —and the same would be true of Lope—is the enormous variety of the sources from which he draws his material. We set aside, of course, his distinctively religious plays, the *Autos Sacramentales*, which in themselves fill six volumes of his collected works; we set aside his comedies also. Any complete estimate of his genius would have to take ample count of both these fields. For in the *auto*, an unique outgrowth of the Spanish genius, he is admittedly supreme; and in comedy too he shows powers of

a very high order. *La Dama Duende* (*The Fairy Lady*), for instance, is a most airy creation, and it is worked out with inimitable grace and spirit. But all these things lie beyond our scope, and we are to consider him solely as a tragic poet. Here again we are at once met by the vast variety of his themes. Roman history, Jewish history, Spanish history, English history, classical legend, Christian legend—all these serve as storehouses for his art. But his chief haunt, it need hardly be said, is the life of his own time and country; his chief creation, romantic tragedy in the special sense which it naturally bore to a Spaniard: a highly idealised reflection of the passions of chivalry as they fired the hearts, if not of his own time, at least of a well remembered and ever regretted past. The religion, the romance, the chivalry, the blending of gaiety and martial pride, the whole tissue of passions and instincts which made the Spaniard of that age a marked man, an object at once of admiration and resentment to the rest of Europe—all these may have been painted with greater brilliance, their surface caught with greater exactitude, by Lope de Vega. That would seem to be the prevailing opinion among Spanish critics of the present day. But if we would see all these things lifted to a higher power, revealed in the fullest significance that can be drawn from them by imaginative

be absurd to contend that their employment by the Spanish dramatists, and even by Calderon, is always congruous or defensible. Two things, however, are to be remembered. In the first place, a language so flexible and so rich in rhyme as the Spanish is able to bend these elaborate forms to purposes which, in a language like ours, would be absolutely impossible. And as a matter of fact such passages flow with an ease and spontaneity which, without the irrefragable proof of eye and ear, would have seemed incredible. In the second place, as we shall see directly, the lyrical element in the Spanish drama is far stronger than in that of any other nation. And therefore lyric measures like the sonnet, or measures, such as the *ottava*, which may fairly be used for lyric purposes, have a place in Spanish tragedy which they certainly would not have in the tragedy of France, or even in that of England. Accordingly, when full allowance has been made for aberrations, it cannot, I think, be fairly said that the general effect of such metres is either unnatural or undramatic.

And after all, the proportion which such passages bear to the whole is, in general, extremely small. It cannot possibly be urged that the prevailing character of Spanish tragedy, in respect of form, is other than in a high degree indigenous, spontaneous and dramatic. The groundwork of the whole, it must be remembered, is the old national

ballad metre—a metre much resembling that of our own ballads, save that assonance is substituted for rhyme—a metre extraordinarily flexible and lending itself, as few metres could, to that expression of rapidly changing emotion, mood, and thought, which is of the essence of the drama. In this metre the greater part of the tragedy is commonly written. But with it are interwoven—and the transition is so natural as often to be almost imperceptible—such other national metres as the *quadrilla*, the short-lined rhyming quatrain (a b b a is the scheme of rhyme), or the more elaborate *silva*, in rhymed lines of varying length, which is the metre commonly employed for the more highly-wrought passages of lyric utterance. Thus, with certain exceptions above indicated, the general result, so far as form goes, is strikingly varied and dramatic, but at the same time strikingly harmonious.

We now turn to consider more closely the leading characteristics of the tragic type created by Spain; and, in particular, the place of Calderon in the general development of tragic drama. The unities, it is perhaps hardly necessary to say, are no less completely disregarded by Calderon than by Shakespeare. That yoke never succeeded in imposing itself upon the drama of Spain. The unity of place, for instance, is thrown to the winds in *El Magico Prodigioso* and *El Pintor de su Deshonra*, to take two of the most

notable examples from the plays of Calderon. In the former play the scene shifts backwards and forwards from the lonely hermitage of Cipriano to the house of Justina in Antioch, and then again to the prison and the place of execution. In the latter we are transported from Gaeta to Barcelona, and then back again to Italy, where the scene hovers between the city and the lonely grange whither Serafina has been carried by her ruffian lover. In the same way with the unity of time. In *El Magico* more than a year passes between the opening and the close: the year, namely, which, with the object of gaining Justina, Cipriano devotes to the service of the Devil and the Black Art. And this year is both preceded and followed by events for which further time must be allowed. So also with *Amar despues de la Muerte* (*Love triumphant over Death*). Here there is an interval of three years between the first act and the rest. The revolt of the Moriscos, which is merely impending in the first act, is at the beginning of the second a long-accomplished fact. And a further space elapses—how much is not, I think, anywhere precisely indicated—between the murder of the heroine and its expiation. Instances of such defiance of the unities might be multiplied indefinitely.

It is true, no doubt, that with Calderon this is commonly a matter more of externals than it is

with the greatest of the Elizabethans; that he seldom even attempted to draw from it the same strength, the same vital consequences which, as we have seen, were drawn by Shakespeare. As a rule, for instance, he can hardly be said to use it as an opening for portraying the growth of character. There is little in him that is even remotely parallel to the profound change which comes over the character of the hero in *Macbeth* or *Lear*. Still, even here, there is one notable exception; it is to be found in one of the most striking of his tragedies, *Amar despues de la Muerte*. And the point is manifestly so important that it may be illustrated by a brief sketch of the plot.

It is the time of the Morisco persecution. The heroine of the play is Clara, daughter of Malec, who traces his descent to the Moorish kings of Cordova. In the opening scene Malec is grossly insulted by Mendoza, a Castilian nobleman; and Tuzani, a noble Morisco who has long been in love with Clara, comes forward to avenge his honour. His offer is rejected both by Clara and her father. But, in spite of this, he forces his way into Mendoza's presence. A duel ensues, in which both men perform prodigies of valour. It is, however, cut short by Mendoza's friends, who, by way of atonement for the insult, propose that Mendoza shall offer his hand to Clara. This he scornfully refuses.

Three years pass, and the Moriscos are now in full revolt under Malec's kinsman, Valor, who has married Tuzani's sister. For the moment they hold the Spaniards at bay, and, in a pause of the fighting, Tuzani and Clara are married amid general rejoicings. But hardly is their troth plighted when news is brought that the Spanish army is suddenly advancing. Tuzani hastily parts from Clara, vowing to return the same night to claim her as his bride. He does so, and is only severed from the city by one ravine when a wild explosion is heard; the wall is torn open, and he sees the Spaniards rush in through the breach. The next moment he sees Clara dragged to a window by a ruffianly soldier and mortally wounded, while he is powerless to help. He leaps down the ravine and reaches the city only to clasp the dying woman in his arms. Still holding the lifeless body, he swears never to rest until he has run down the murderer and proved his undying love by vengeance. But what hope has he that the oath will ever be fulfilled? He knows neither the name of the murderer, nor his face, nor any mark to tell him by. His only help is in God, and God will surely guide him to the mark. Chance does the work. Disguised as a Spanish soldier, he makes his way into the enemy's camp. There a squabble arises in the guard-room over the Morisco booty. Tuzani and a Spanish soldier, Garces, are

both involved, and both put under arrest. A chance word arouses Tuzani's suspicions, and he draws Garces into talk. "What," Garces inquires, "is your history?" "I am come in search of a man. I know neither his face, nor his name, nor any token of him . . . but I have found him." "You talk riddles; but I care not; for I at least am sure to be set free; not a hair of my head will the General touch; it was I who laid the mine under the enemy's city; it was I who led the assault . . . Would it had not been so!" "How is that?" cried Tuzani, starting forward, as though to lose no word nor tone of the other's tale. "Well, it is a horrible story. Chance brought me to the chamber of a Moorish woman, the most beautiful I had ever seen. My passions rose. I seized her and was about to ravish her, when I heard the steps of my comrades. I could not bear that any should share my triumph, and—yes, it was a cowardly deed—I raised my arm——" "Was *this* the blow you struck?"[1] shouts Tuzani, as the murderer falls dead at his feet.

The close is a splendid example of the *Lances de Calderon*, the surprises, the *coups de théâtre*, for which he was renowned. But the play is remarkable on at least two other grounds. It shows a capacity for sympathy with an alien race and a hostile creed of which we should hardly have suspected so stout a

[1] Fue como esta la puñalada?—*Amar despues de la Muerte*, Jornada iii.

Spaniard and so bigoted a Catholic. And, what is more immediately to our purpose, it shows a sense of the deep change which a great trial may bring over a man's character, over his most deeply rooted impulses, which is surely a most remarkable proof of the penetration of his genius. At the beginning of the drama Tuzani is all fire and flame, eager, impetuous, unguarded. In the closing scenes he is the very opposite of all this. His probation has come; he is tried in the fire, and is not found wanting. He guards himself with invincible patience; he measures his ground at every step; he is cool, cautious, calculating, crafty. Then, when the proof is at last complete, when suspicion has deepened into certainty and certainty into indelible conviction, in an instant his old self blazes out and sweeps away all obstacles, like chaff before the wind. No one, of course, will assert that we have here anything of the subtlety, the minute shading, that is to be found in Shakespeare. But we may fairly claim to discern something of the same sense of moral growth.

This, however, is no doubt an exception. And as a general rule the characters of Calderon, allowing for change of circumstances, remain at the end substantially what they were at the beginning. Yet, if he did not commonly draw all the resources that Shakespeare drew from violation of the unities, at

least he secured for his tragedies a liveliness and variety, he gave them an air of life and truth to nature, which are hardly to be found in the classical type of tragedy: certainly not in its more modern examples. In variety of incident, in fidelity to the atmosphere of Spanish life, in vivid reproduction of those somewhat idealised types of Spanish character and moral temper to which he devoted himself, it would be impossible to surpass the creations of Calderon. And it is well to note that it is precisely those qualities, variety and fidelity to nature, on which his great precursor, Lope, had fastened as those to gain which he had sacrificed all his "rules," and put the classical models "under lock and key."

It may be fully admitted that one of these qualities, liveliness of incident and circumstance, is liable to abuse; that it sometimes takes a form which can only be described as melodramatic; and sometimes, at any rate to a mind which is not Spanish, degenerates into sheer childishness or brutality. Thus, in two at least of Calderon's plays, *El Magico Prodigioso* and *El Joseph de las Mugeres*—the latter a truly charming title—the Devil appears under conditions which to us are simply ludicrous: as a crocodile stranded upon a rock and vainly snapping his jaws as his Christian prey is borne up to heaven. Or again, take that

highly curious drama, *La Cisma de Inglaterra*. Here the chief villain of the piece, Cardinal Wolsey, ends with begging his bread of the saintly Catherine, while, at the fall of the curtain, Henry and his daughter Mary take their seats on the throne in triumph, with the head of Anne Boleyn for their footstool. There are two other plays upon which still stronger criticisms might be passed. These are *La Devocion de la Cruz* and *El Medico de su Honra*. The former is one of the least defensible of the dramatist's creations, as it is among the earliest. The hero is a brigand, who has been guilty of almost every conceivable crime. At last, amid general execrations, he is hunted down and shot. But the print of the Cross is discovered on his body, and the curses are at once turned into adoration. His remains are treated as saintly relics, he is regarded as blessed with the special favour of Heaven. Could anything be more revolting than this? Could anything be less dramatic?

Against the dramatic quality of the other play, *El Medico*, nothing is to be said. It is indeed one of the most dramatic—as, saving the close, it is among the finest—of Calderon's tragedies.[1] As has already been mentioned, it is one of the many which have jealousy for their theme. The hero, Don

[1] Calderon's play has been said to be based on one of the same title by Lope de Vega. But the assertion seems disputable. See *Obras de Lope de Vega* (Madrid, 1890, etc.), V. i. 456.

Gutierre, has grounds—plausible enough, but, in fact, unfounded—to suspect his wife of unfaithfulness. At length he discovers her writing a letter to her supposed lover, the king's brother. She swoons away in terror. When she awakes, she finds a letter in her hand. She opens it and reads as follows: "You have but two hours to live. You are a Christian. Spend them in seeking salvation for your soul; your body is doomed." The scene changes. Gutierre appears at the door of the house, leading a surgeon blindfold. On pain of instant death, he forces the man to swear obedience to his commands. Then he leads him in, and, through a grating, shows him a woman's form stretched, apparently senseless, on a couch. "You will bleed that body to death." Again the surgeon hesitates, but, on peril of his life, at length consents. The deed done, the surgeon is led out, again blindfold, and, after a few streets have been traversed, is left to find his way home as best he can. After a few steps he falls into the arms of the king, Don Pedro of Aragon, who is painted as a Spanish Haroun al Raschid. The surgeon forthwith guides him to the house of murder, which he had been careful to mark with his bloody hand as he was led out from the door. Gutierre is called forth, and breaks into loud lamentations over the untimely death of his beloved wife, "the fairest and chastest

of women." The king, divining the truth, plights him on the spot to another woman, and then asks him what he would do if he should ever come to suspect her faith, adding the pointed question: "What is the meaning of that bloody hand upon your door?" To the first question he replies: "If all else failed, I would cure her malady by bleeding." To the second: "That is my mark, my scutcheon; and your Majesty knows that a stain on the honour is only to be washed away by blood." The lady joins with the king in applauding his discretion. Let us hope she liked her bargain.

We pass to another characteristic of the Spanish drama, and, in particular, that of Calderon—the blending of tragedy with comedy. It may be noted that this is one of the practices which Lope de Vega is at special pains to defend, and which he considers to have added much to "the variety and fidelity" of his country's drama. He is, however, careful to add that the comic action of a tragedy ought not to be in the nature of an "episode"; that it ought to be furnished by characters who play an integral part in the general action of the piece. With this condition Calderon invariably complies. And this serves to distinguish his method from such plays as Middleton's *Changeling*. His plan is that the comic element is supplied by the attendants of those who

sustain the tragic action of the drama; and their actions or comments generally take the form of a burlesque, or parody, on the serious action of the play. An illustration may be taken from *El Magico Prodigioso*. The heroine of the play, Justina, is beset by lovers, of whom two, Cipriano and another, are the most importunate. She rejects them both. Her servant is immediately beset by their servants. She accepts them both. "But, my dear girl, won't this be rather awkward?" "Not at all. I'll take the two of you—*alternative*" (in good scholastic Latin). "What does that mean?" "Oh, every other day; you on Monday, him on Tuesday." The bargain is struck. But after a day or two Cipriano's servant is called off—unfortunately, on *his* day—to aid in his master's unlawful studies. He returns on the same day in the next year, to find his rival in possession. "Hold hard! it's *my* day." "Not at all. It was your day this day last year; there are 365 days in the year—an odd number; therefore it's *my* day this year. Don't you see?" "Ah, my good friend, you've forgotten that it's leap year—an even number. So it's *my* day. Don't you see?" This is excellent fooling; and, when all is said and done, it is, I think, perfectly legitimate in a tragedy. As Lope pleaded, it gives "variety and nature," if it does nothing else. And I cannot believe that it interferes seriously with the tragic effect of the whole. On the

other hand, it cannot be said to enhance that effect, as the parallel scenes in Shakespeare enhance the tragic effect of *Macbeth* and *Hamlet* and *King Lear*. And for that reason, neither Lope nor Calderon can claim to have gained what the highest genius alone had the power to gain from that which, by England as well as by Spain, was accepted in the first instance simply as a tradition of the national stage.

But there are qualities in Calderon still deeper, and still more characteristic, than those on which we have hitherto dwelt. These are his tragic pathos and his lyric inspiration, two qualities in which he takes rank among the greatest masters, and which make him, as they made Shakespeare, not only a great dramatist, but a great dramatic poet. To illustrate the former we may take *El Pintor de su Deshonra*, one of the most pathetic tragedies ever written, rehearsing its plot as succinctly—and unfortunately, as baldly—as we may.

Serafina, a lady of Naples, has loved Alvaro and secretly betrothed herself to him. He, however, suddenly disappears, and she, with her father's consent, is wooed by Don Juan, a Spanish nobleman many years older than herself, and widely known for his genius as a painter. Faithful to Alvaro, she long refuses him. But at length news is brought of Alvaro's death, and she reluctantly consents to be Juan's wife. The play opens with the morning of

their marriage. No sooner are they man and wife than Alvaro returns and, finding Serafina alone, passionately urges her to accept him as her lover. She firmly refuses, admitting her love, but swearing that she will never forget her duty to her husband. The next moment Juan enters and takes ship with his bride for Barcelona. So ends the first act.

The second opens, a few weeks or months later, in Juan's studio at Barcelona. He is painting Serafina's portrait. But, for the first time in his experience, his cunning fails him and the brush drops from his hand. In words of exquisite tenderness, he tells her why this is. Till now, he has always been inspired by an ideal more beautiful than the form he strove to render. Now the ideal itself has taken flesh and blood in his model, and his art is powerless to embody it. Discouraged by the failure, he goes out; and Alvaro at once enters, disguised as a mariner. Once more, he implores her to betray her husband. Once more she sternly repulses him. Juan shortly returns and begs her to take part with him in the rejoicings of the carnival. Full of fore-bodings, she suffers herself to be led to the public square. There Alvaro again presents himself, masked in a fresh disguise, and offers to dance with her. She hesitates; but, at her husband's bidding, accepts. They dance a few steps, and she uses the moment peremptorily to bid him depart at

once. She then leaves the square with her husband for the house of a friend hard by; Alvaro lingers, in despair. Suddenly a cry of fire is raised, and Juan rushes in with Serafina swooning in his arms. He leaves her in charge of a group of sailors, and hastens back to save the others from the flames. Among the sailors is Alvaro, who basely seizes the chance, carries off Serafina to his ship and at once sets sail. Juan returns to see the ship weighing anchor and to hear that his wife is in it. He plunges into the water; but, after a pause, is carried back, half drowned, from his fruitless effort.

In the last act the scene again shifts to Italy. Alvaro has returned with Serafina to a lonely grange near Naples. She is inconsolable at her own shame and the mortal wrong done to her husband. Juan, meantime, has left all and come to Naples, as the sole chance of finding her. He has taken service with the Prince, and been commissioned by him to paint one of the halls of the palace. The fresco is now completed, and he requests an audience of the Prince to show him the work on which his best powers have been spent. It is the story of Deianira carried off by the Centaur before the eyes of Hercules; under the guise of the old fable, he has painted the history of his own sorrow and shame. And, as he explains the picture, the memory of his cruel wrong sweeps over him, and he well-nigh betrays the secret which

it is his chief purpose to guard. The Prince is loud in praise, and, struck by a sudden thought, bids Juan follow him to the grange—whither a strange chance had led him that morning—in order to paint the portrait of a mysterious and beautiful lady, unknown to herself. Juan, his mind clouded with tragic forebodings, orders the attendant to prepare both colours and pistols. "Who knows," he whispers, "but my next portrait may be painted in blood?" Reaching the grange, he is placed in a grated balcony, and Serafina is brought into the adjoining room. Worn out with sorrow, she falls asleep, and in her sleep is recognised by her husband. "Shall he obey the ruthless law of honour," he debates with himself, "and avenge his wrongs on the instant, or shall he wait for yet more damning proof?" As he questions, Serafina starts from a dream in which she has seen herself murdered by her husband. At her cries, Alvaro rushes in to render help. And Juan, his doubts now swept to the winds, discharges both pistols through the bars. He had painted the story of his own shame; he has now painted the picture out with blood.

The pathos of the original is indescribable; and at the close it passes into the yet higher region of tragedy. This will seem the more remarkable, when we consider the essentially romantic, the adventurous, character of the story. In the hands of a lesser poet

the interest, we can hardly be wrong in saying, would infallibly have centred round the outward incidents. The genius of Calderon forces us to see through them, and by their aid, to the human passions and the sense of tears in human things which constitute the tragedy.

Even more significant is the lyric strain which runs though the music of Calderon and gives the dominant tone to his whole work. What has already been said of Shakespeare in this connection applies, perhaps in a yet higher degree, to Calderon. For the lyric strain plays a still larger part with him than it does with Shakespeare; and, as with Shakespeare, it takes the double shape of passion and reflection. It is well to quote a few passages by way of illustration. The first shall be taken from one of the two crucial scenes of *Amar despues de la Muerte*; the scene in which Tuzani holds his dead bride in his arms and swears to take vengeance on the murderer:—

Ye heavens which look down upon my woes, ye mountains who bear witness to my suffering, ye winds who hearken to my sorrows, ye flames who see my anguish, how could ye all conspire that the purest of all lights should be quenched, the fairest of all flowers be withered, the sweetest of all breaths should fail? Ye men who know love's secret, oh, tell me in this agony! oh, counsel me in this trial! What should the lover do who, coming to greet his lady on the night which is to crown the love of years, finds her

bathed in her own blood, that white flesh dabbled with crimson, that gold tried seven times in the furnace of affliction? What should the doomed man do who, seeking his bridal bed, found it a tomb where the fairest form that God ever shaped in His own image lay a corpse within his arms? But no, answer me not. Give me no counsel. For if, in such a fate, man finds no prompting in his sorrow, what help can counsel give? Ye rocks of Alpujarra, thou scene of a deed the most cowardly, of a victory the most shameful, of a glory the most infamous that hath ever been achieved, would that never the peaks of thy mountains, would that never the depths of thy valleys had gazed upon a beauty so ill-starred! But what serves it to lament, if my laments are whistled down the wind? . . . . Since, then, this beauty hath wasted, since this flower, this gracious rose, is plucked—a marvel in life, a marvel still in death—here I swear, I take a lover's oath, that I will have vengeance for her death; and since . . . the drum of the Spaniard is now scarce heard and his hosts are withdrawn, I will follow upon their track, and I will pick the murderer from their thousands, and I will avenge, if not her death, at least the pangs of my own heart; that so the flames which behold it and the winds which hear it and the world which knows it and the doom which decrees it and the Heaven which grants it; that so man and beast and fish and bird, the sun, the moon, the stars, the flowers—that water, earth and air and fire may see and understand, may know and blaze abroad that in an Arab breast and in an Arab heart Love reigns triumphant over Death, and Death himself may never boast his power to part two constant lovers.

Here surely, if anywhere, we have passion in spate; a torrent of lava which sweeps everything before it. Even through the baldness of a rough version the irresistible force of it can hardly fail to

strike us; nor the breathless speed with which it hurries us along; nor the magnificent ease with which the poet's inspiration leaps out in one unbroken blaze of gorgeous imagery.

The two other passages shall be taken from *La Vida es Sueño* (*Life is a Dream*). A few words of preface will put us in possession of the plot. At the bidding of the astrologers, the King of Poland has cast his son, Segismundo, into a dungeon, where, when the play opens, he lies laden with fetters. Soon after, his father's caprice changing, he is released and brought to the palace. There he bears himself as might have been expected; he has been treated like a brute, and like a brute he behaves. At the king's order he is cast back hastily into prison. The former of our two passages belongs to the scene of his brief release. Meeting the heroine, Rosaura, he is deeply struck with her beauty and asks her name. She, concealing the truth, replies that she serves the Princess Estrella (the Star). Segismundo breaks out in indignant protest:—

In the realm of the fragrance of flowers
I have seen the Rose
Crowned queen of the emerald bowers,
Queen of all that blows.

'Mid the jewelled hosts deep hidden
In the womb of earth
I have seen the Diamond bidden
Reign by right of birth.

In the dazzling spaces of even,
When the sky is bare,
I have seen on the throne of heaven
The Evening Star.

'Mid the seven spheres I have noted
The Sun bear sway,
To the rule of the restless promoted,
The Lord of day.

How then, if in all things the fairest
Is worshipped of all,
How beseems it that thou not sharest
The dues to thy peers that fall?

The due of the Gem that is meetest,
Of the Star that glows,
The due of the brightest, the sweetest,
Of the Sun and the Rose?

This will perhaps waken an echo of another poem, the famous lines of Heine :—

The rose and the lily and the sun and the dove,
I loved them all once with a rapture of love.
—I love them no more. I love now all alone
The pure, the ethereal, the fairy, the one;
Who, herself the sole fount of all love,
Is rose and lily and sun and dove.

To an English ear the simpler strain of the German may come home with yet greater force than the jewelled splendour of the Spaniard. But there is room for both.

Our last instance is drawn from a later scene of the same play, the scene which follows Segismundo's return to the dungeon. The faithful old courtier,

Clotaldo, visits him there and strives to persuade him that his brief hour of light and liberty was no more than a dream. This is his reply :—

'Tis true ; then let us cast away
Ambition's feverish, mad display,
And dream in sooth, while dream we may.
For in this world of stress and strife
The dream, the only dream, is life ;
And he who lives, 'tis proved too well,
Dreams till he wakes at fate's loud knell.
Dreameth the king upon his throne,
A phantom, to himself unknown ;
And all the praise he seeks and finds
He writes upon the fleeting winds,
Till death alas ! turn all to dust.
How shall he then his kingship trust
—A dream that's broken at a breath
And wakens to the dream of death ?
Dreameth the rich amid his store,
Heaping up sorrows evermore ;
Dreameth the needy in his dearth,
Dreameth the thrall who spurns his birth,
Dreameth the proud who toils for fame,
Dreameth the foe who works him shame ;
All, all men dream, though no man knows it ;
So comes man's hour of life, so goes it.
I dream these fetters bind me here ;
I dreamt that throne was mine—ah, where ?
The flattering vision melts in air.
What then is life ? A frenzied fit,
A trance that mocks man's puny wit,
A mist, where flickering phantoms gleam,
Where nothing is, but all things seem,
—All but the shadow of a dream.[1]

[1] It will be observed that the last two lines of this translation are taken from the close of Shelley's *Sensitive Plant*. I believe, however, that I am only

Once again, we are reminded of another poet, of Shakespeare's

> We are such stuff
> As dreams are made of, and our little life
> Is rounded with a sleep.

And once again, all we can say is, there is room for both; for the inexhaustible imagery of Calderon, no less than for the stern simplicity of Shakespeare. In each alike the spirit of brooding reflection has taken flight in a form which, lyric as it is, is none the less essentially dramatic.

After Calderon, a great blight fell upon the Spanish drama, as it did also upon that of England. For a time the classical model was imposed; and all that was vital withered beneath its heavy hand. When, towards the close of the next century, a brighter day began to dawn, it was to Calderon that the romantic revival looked for inspiration. In this movement La Huerta, himself a dramatist of some power, led the way; and, as was fitting, a collection

restoring to Calderon his own. For I have little doubt that Shelley, consciously or unconsciously, was adapting from the passage in the text. We know, from Mrs. Shelley and other witnesses, that he had the greatest admiration for Calderon (not, I imagine, as his wife says, for the *autos*, but for the *comedias*); and in at least one other passage, the Song of the Earth at the close of *Prometheus*, there is an undoubted translation of a phrase from this very play:—

> As the sun rules, even with a tyrant's gaze,
> The unquiet republic of the maze
> Of planets.

"The unquiet republic of the planets" is the literal rendering of some words in the last stanza but two of the lyric quoted above. Shelley's translation of scenes from *El Magico* will be in the memory of all.

of Spanish dramas, largely drawn from Calderon, was the chief counter in the game. To this collection La Huerta prefixed a preface, *La Escena Española defendida*, in which he vigorously turned the tables upon his classical opponents. One of them, the editor of *Le Théâtre français*, had said: "The plays of Racine are worth those of all the dramatists of other nations put together." "Not so," replies La Huerta, "it would be more true to say that the plays of Calderon are worth all those of France, Italy, and England put together." Such disputes are childish, though it is easy to understand the irritation of the zealous Spaniard. Once more, we are driven to say there is room for both; for the majestic tenderness, the concentrated passion, of Racine, no less than for the infinite variety, the poignant pathos, the profound reflection, the lyric rapture of Calderon and Shakespeare.

LECTURE IX

ROMANTIC TRAGEDY: HISTORICAL DRAMA: GOETHE'S FAUST

AGAIN we leap over a hundred years, and find ourselves in the thick of what is known as the Romantic Revival (c. 1770-1840). In the interval, it need hardly be said, the classical yoke had established itself over the whole of Europe, and in no field more completely than in the drama. The spirit of France had triumphed not only in Italy, whence indeed it had sprung in the first instance, but in Germany, England, and Spain. To break the force of that spirit, to liberate those countries where it had always been an alien and an invader, to shake it even in the land of its birth, was the work of the close of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth. The classical rules were everywhere questioned; in every direction bold experiments were made. A new spirit, a new imaginative force, was poured into the literature of Europe. And the result

was such an awakening as had not been known since the days of the Renaissance.

It is, in fact, nothing short of a revolution—a revolution in thought, imagination, and social ideals —with which we are confronted. In thought, this revolution is bound up with the speculations of Rousseau, Kant, and the German disciples of Kant. And the general effect of it was to overthrow the narrow conception of reason which had prevailed during the last century, to bring man once more face to face with the mysteries which surround life on every side, to force him once more to reckon with the world which is laid open by his religious, imaginative, and emotional experience. In the field of imagination, the same movement gave us the work of Wordsworth and Coleridge, of Byron and Shelley, of Chateaubriand and Hugo, of Goethe and Schiller. In the field of action, it resulted in that upheaval which has changed the face of Western Europe, and which we sum up under the name of the French Revolution.

The literature of the period reflects, as has been said, the unrest of this great revolution in thought and action. There is not one of the leading writers who is not, in some way or other, affected by it. Even those who, like Burke, abhorred its working in the realm of action, accepted it with a whole heart in the field of thought and imagination. And

on the poets it worked with peculiar intensity. One and all—Wordsworth no less than Shelley, Goethe no less than Schiller—drew their inspiration from its spell. One and all chafe against the shackles of the old order; they look forward, with eager aspiration, to the new order which, as faith bade them hope, was to shape itself from the ruins.

In the drama, as in other fields, the age was fertile in experiments. And this is true above all of Germany, with which we are concerned in the present lecture. The drama of reflection, the drama of pure fantasy, the revival of the classical drama, the creation of the historical drama—all these were among the ambitions—can it also be said that they were among the achievements?—of the time. The last is of particular importance. It was here that —with one exception, to be noticed directly—the attempt came nearest to achievement; here that it was most conspicuously original; here that it was most persistently renewed. The historical drama remained for two generations the chief battle-ground of the romantic army; and the experiment of Goethe and Schiller was repeated by Byron, Manzoni, and Hugo. The historical drama was, moreover, an entirely new creation. Before this period, it can hardly, except in name, be said to have existed. The historical plays of Shakespeare present the nearest approach to it; but they retain so much of the mere chronicle—

they are, moreover, in some cases so purely individual and personal in their interest—as to offer no fair analogy to that which was now attempted. And the same statement, with marked qualifications, would probably hold good even of the Roman tragedies of Shakespeare and Jonson. We are entitled to say, therefore, that the historical play, as essayed by Goethe and Schiller, opens a new horizon, that it forms a wholly new departure, in the history of the drama.

In what, then, does the originality of the historical drama consist? In what sense can it be said to offer a type of play distinct in kind from either classical or Elizabethan tragedy? It can only, I think, claim to do so if it brings the corporate, as distinct from the individual, life of man upon the stage; if in the personages of the drama it embodies, more or less completely, some aspect of the national, political, or social conflicts of humanity. Now it is clear that the difficulties of such a task are enormous, if not insuperable; that it is only too likely to end either in giving us the old individualist drama under a new disguise, with a certain outfit of picturesque trappings and adornments; or in presenting us with mere abstractions, mere walking doctrines, destitute of flesh and blood. In the former case, it ceases to be the historical drama. In the latter, it cannot claim to be any drama at all. The idols of the platform

are well enough upon the platform. On the stage they are empty and irritating phantoms.[1]

From these dangers it cannot be said that the dramatists of the romantic revival entirely escaped. The greater number of the historical dramas produced during this period are historical only in name. This is true of *Marino Faliero*; it is true to a considerable degree of *Carmagnola* and *Adelchi*; it is true in some measure even of *Götz* and *Wallenstein*. Of the opposite defect there is doubtless not so much trace; for the simple reason that the historical drama, pure and simple, was seldom attempted. The dramatists of the time shrank, perhaps wisely, from the inherent difficulties of the task. And the one drama in which the attempt is seriously made, Schiller's *Don Carlos*, has been charged—whether justly or not, we will not ask for the moment—with sinking into those political abstractions which are the danger besetting this form of tragedy.

Yet, whatever the success of the endeavour, it would surely be in the last degree pedantic and narrow-minded to quarrel with those who were bold enough to make it. Such experiments can do nothing but good; and the moment they cease to be possible,

[1] An illuminating Essay on the Historical Drama (*Il dramma storico*) will be found in Mazzini, *Opere* II. pp. 198-272. It is written from the point of view of an ardent believer. Another brilliant exposition of the Historical Drama, as it might be, is contained in the Preface to *Cromwell* (see, in particular, pp. 49-50, 67-8); and *Cromwell* itself, though manifestly crude, comes far nearer to the ideal than most dramas of the kind.

the moment they are barred out in the name of artistic righteousness, we may be very sure that the imaginative spirit is not far from fossilisation and decay. In this particular case, moreover, there was, when all abatements have been made, a considerable measure of success. And that applies especially to the work of Goethe and Schiller. In *Egmont*, indeed, and in that later play where Goethe set himself to embody in dramatic form the vast issues raised by the French Revolution (*Die natürliche Tochter*), the poet can hardly be said to have outstepped the limits of purely individual tragedy; and neither of them can be reckoned among his greater triumphs. But in some scenes of *Götz* he must surely be admitted to have dramatised with startling vividness the corporate spirit of the age which he strove to bring before us. And the same must be said of the prologue to Schiller's *Wallenstein* (*Das Lager*). There the whole temper of the traitor general's camp, the spirit of the army of fortune swept together from all the ends of the earth, is painted to the life. If we except the corresponding scenes in *Henry V.*—scenes which, still more life-like, are painted on a far smaller scale and a far more compassable canvas—there is nothing like it in dramatic literature.

A still more striking example, as I believe, is to be found in Schiller's *Carlos*. The outward incidents

of this are drawn from that grim chapter of Spanish history which relates the murder of his eldest son by Philip II. The same theme had been taken a few years earlier by Alfieri in his first tragedy, *Filippo*. Both dramatists drew their material from the same source, the romance of Saint Réal. But while the Italian confines himself to the purely personal side of the subject, the love of Carlos for his father's wife, once his own affianced bride, Elizabeth of Valois, the German widens his canvas; his theme is the struggle between the old faith and the new, between the forces of freedom on the one side and those of tyranny and repression upon the other. It has been urged that Posa, the prophet of the new order, is a pure abstraction, the lifeless embodiment of Schiller's own views, an "enthusiast of humanity." I do not agree with this opinion, though I may easily be mistaken. To me it seems that we have here not only a great work of art, but an entirely original form of drama; the one instance in which the historical drama, as I conceive it might be in the hands of a man of genius, is consistently carried out; in which the corporate life of man is embodied in real figures of flesh and blood; in which we are brought face to face with the invisible forces, which rule that collective life, disputing for the possession of the individual soul.

In the same play we find a shining example of

another quality which, as we have already seen, is among the most marked characteristics of the romantic drama, understood in the wider sense, as a general name for that form of drama which shaped itself in direct opposition to the classical model. This is the power of presenting character not as a fixed quantity, but in growth. We have noticed this already in Shakespeare; we have noticed it, under a more modest form, in Calderon. And here, in *Don Carlos*, we have the same thing boldly attempted and, as I think, successfully carried out. The hero is one man at the beginning of the play, quite another at the end. Under the influence of a stronger will and more ardent temperament than his own, the timid and despairing lover of the opening scenes becomes the enthusiast, now dreamy, now fired by faith and passion, of the close. This, I should say, is significant in itself; it is still more significant from its bearing on the general course of the development of the drama. We have seen it before; we shall see it again in connection with the dramatic work of Browning, not to mention a yet more notable instance of which I am to speak directly. I am quite prepared to admit that, in this respect as in others, *Carlos* shows signs of immaturity and crudeness. In performance, I think it great; but I consider that it is still greater in promise. And that promise, I should say, was

never adequately fulfilled. More than ten years separated *Carlos* from the author's next drama, *Wallenstein*. And in the interval he had fallen under an influence which to him was an alien influence, the influence of Goethe. That and the later plays, of which *Die Braut von Messina* is perhaps the finest, are avowedly an approximation to the classical model; and if they have a magnificence and an artistic finish, they have also a stiffness and a remoteness, which are not to be found in *Carlos*. And for myself, I would gladly barter the magnificence of *Wallenstein* and the gorgeousness of *Die Braut*, not to speak of the rhetoric of *Tell* and *Die Jungfrau von Orleans*, for the historical genius and the power of penetrating character, above all character in growth, which I find in *Carlos*.

From the greatest of Schiller's plays we naturally pass to that which holds the same rank in the plays of Goethe. You will understand that I speak of *Faust*. And here let me repeat a warning which I have often given, and might have given still more often than I have. Let me remind you that our subject in this course is strictly limited, and that the types we select have to be treated rather as landmarks in the general growth and development of the drama than on their own intrinsic merits. I trust, therefore, you will not suppose that I am about to attempt a complete account of this celebrated poem.

Among the innumerable things that might be said about Goethe's masterpiece, we must content ourselves with picking out two. And it will be seen that each of these has the closest bearing upon what has been said of Schiller and other dramatists of the period. The first is that in *Faust* we have a supreme instance of that presentation of character in growth which we have already seen to be characteristic of the romantic drama. The second is that in *Faust* we have also a supreme instance of that symbolic method, that endeavour to embody the corporate or common life of humanity in an individual which, under a strangely different form, we have seen to lie at the root of the historical drama. Let us take each of these singly.

Every reader of *Faust* must have noticed the former peculiarity. In the course of the play—we are, of course, bound to treat the two parts as forming, in the conception of the dramatist, an organic whole—the character of the hero undergoes a complete transformation. A self-absorbed thinker at the beginning, brought to despair by the impotence of human reason, by the sense that "nothing worthy proving can be proven," he first throws himself blindly into a reckless and selfish passion, then into the stir and stress of action, and finally finds peace in ceaseless toil for the good of others. If this is not change of character, we should clearly

be at a loss to say what is. The thing is so marked that some critics have denied the presence of any character at all. It is, they have urged, simply a collection of scenes strung together at random, without any coherent conception, without any unity to bind them into a dramatic whole. There is a sense in which this is true. And it is manifest that neither the drama, nor the character of the hero, either has or is intended to have the same unity that we find in *Hamlet* or in *Lear*. Of that more is to be said directly. It is enough here to urge that such a view is sometimes presented in a most distorted and untenable form; to assert that, both in the character and in the drama, there *is* a unity, though it is not of that closely knit kind that we have in the classical drama, or even, with obvious relaxations, in the tragedies of Shakespeare. The criticism, however, may be made to serve our immediate purpose. For it shows, what is not to be disputed, that the character of Faust, during an "action" which covers a lifetime, undergoes greater changes than would have been possible in dramas which carry their action at most over a few years and whose duration is probably to be reckoned by months, if not by weeks.

It is obvious that character could not have been handled in this way had not the whole structure of the drama been proportionably loosened. And

this is one of the first things to strike us in reading *Faust*. The structure of Shakespeare's tragedies, as we have seen, is infinitely looser than that of the classical masterpieces. But they are closeness itself as compared with *Faust*. Throughout the second part, in particular, act follows upon act with little apparent connection; and the task of filling in the intervals is left to the imagination of the reader or spectator. The same thing, though doubtless to a less degree, is true of the first part also. This, no doubt, may conceivably be due to the circumstances under which the poem was written; and, so far, it may point to a real defect in the vital unity of the whole. Certain it is that the composition of *Faust* covers nearly the whole lifetime of the poet; that it was begun when he was little more than twenty, and was not finished —"if indeed," to use his own words, "it can even now be said to be finished" — until a few months before his death, at the age of eighty-two. But the arguments against this rather disparaging explanation would seem to be exceedingly strong. For on the one hand the objection applies with not very much less force to the first part than to the second. And yet the truly vital scenes of the first part, disconnected as they often are in appearance, were almost certainly composed at what may fairly be called a single jet, during the few

years which immediately preceded the poet's settlement at Weimar (1775); while the scenes which were added later — for instance, the attempted self-destruction of Faust, the compact with Mephistopheles, and even the great monologue, *Erhabener Geist*, have often a more obvious connection with the rest than several of those which belong to the first draft of the poem. And, on the other hand, small as the outward bond, the bond of incident and action, between the scenes may be, the inward connection, the connection of thought, of sentiment, of natural progress in the character of the hero, is never wanting. On the contrary, to a careful reader it is always abundantly plain. From all this I should conclude that the breaks in the outward action, the general loosening of the structure, were in the deliberate intention of the dramatist; and that he adopted this plan as the only means by which he could find scope for his real subject, for what Browning calls "the incidents in the development of a soul" in its long pilgrimage — if it be lawful to adapt the words of the Prologue — "from earth, through hell, to heaven."

What is certain is that the one bond which holds the drama together is the character of the hero; a character in endless growth, we may almost say, from the cradle to the grave. To throw light

on this character, all the rest is cast into the shade. By the side of this character, all the others, with one exception, are mere sketches and outlines. And even that exception, from one point of view, is more in appearance than reality. The character of Mephistopheles, masterly as it is and a work of genius if ever any was, is in truth no more than an echo and reflection of one side of Faust himself. He merely puts into words—or it may be, deeds—the barren doubt, the reckless selfishness which whispers in the heart of the man whom he hopes to make his tool. Hence the amazing reality—it would not be too much to say, the extraordinary humanity — of Goethe's conception; the very qualities, that is, which distinguish it from the pathetic gloom of Marlowe's and the defiant heroism of Milton's. Thus even Mephistopheles, with all his independence and all his daring originality, is in fact subordinate to Faust; to use the phrase of Aristotle, his character is "carried in the train" of Faust. And the same, in a still more obvious sense, is true of the other figures in the drama. It is true even of the pure and noble figure of Gretchen.

The other point, which cannot fail to strike us at the first glance, is the symbolic method which Goethe has here adopted. The character of Faust is the embodiment of Goethe's own spiritual experience; of the experience, we may rather say,

of the whole age which he represented, of which his own life and reflection and ideals are the ripest fruit. Here again he was guided by a perfectly sound instinct. The old Christian legend, the agony of the soul in its thirst for the unattainable, naturally lent itself to a symbolic treatment. It was only by such treatment that its full significance could be brought out. Even in its more primitive forms—in Rutebœuf, for instance, and in Marlowe —something of symbolism can be traced. And with the far deeper conception which hovered before the imagination of Goethe, the employment of symbolism, on a yet larger scale, became an absolute necessity. Faust is, in truth, not so much an individual as a type; the type of a whole age; the type, as far as any one imaginative creation can be so, of humanity itself. The only scenes in which the reader might be tempted to forget this are those which paint his reckless passion for Gretchen. And the common verdict has stamped them, and justly stamped them, as the finest scenes in the whole drama. But even these would lose half their force if torn from the place they hold in the economy of the whole. And in all else, not only in that which follows but in that which goes before, the symbolic design is unmistakable. It is not the tragedy of the single soul, of Hamlet or Othello; it is the doubts, the

cravings, the aspirations, the passions, the struggles and achievements of mankind, of the soul of man, that the dramatist sets before us.

It is this that forms the link between *Faust* and that historical drama, of which we have already spoken. In *Faust*, as in those rare plays which can justly claim to be historical, it is the common, if not the corporate, life of man that is brought upon the stage. But the task of Goethe, difficult though it was, is lightness itself compared with that which falls on the historical dramatist. In both cases alike the individual has to become a type; the character which moves before our eyes, a symbol of something wider and greater that looms behind. But to the historical dramatist the thing symbolised is apt to remain an abstraction; and, what is more, a controversial abstraction. To Goethe it is something which, with all its inwardness, is liable to enter into the experience of each one of us. To the former it is that which, from the nature of the case, can never be embodied in any individual character, or any series of individual acts. For the corporate life, by its very essence, can never be identified with the individual. To the latter it is that which, though unseen and perhaps unrealised, is still present in the life of every individual, is among the chief forces that govern it, and, in moments of exceptional insight or exaltation, becomes the

only reality amid a world of shadows. It is the inner experience, the life of reflection, the instinctive or conscious pursuit of a given ideal, the desire to penetrate the mystery surrounding us, the quest of unattainable beauty, the craving to help our fellow-men or to leave some enduring monument behind us. And all these things, though they may never have been united in one single soul, still exist dispersedly and by fragments in thousands. What Goethe did was to gather these broken lights into a single prism, to crystallise these scattered capacities in a single character. And in that character he reflects his own ideal of life; the faith, wrung from a life-long experience, as to the steps by which man may strengthen his weakness, repair his imperfection, and slowly win his way from bondage to freedom. The enterprise was perilous enough. But that which the historical dramatist takes upon himself is more perilous yet.

It is manifest that, by the adoption of such a method, something of dramatic reality was inevitably sacrificed. The character of Faust, take it from beginning to end, has more sides than it is possible—or, at least, easily conceivable—for any one character to have. It cannot claim to be a character in the sense in which we apply the term to Hamlet or Othello. It is more shadowy, less coherent, less humanly possible, than they. This was not to be

avoided. It is the price the dramatist had to pay for widening the scope of his presentment, for attempting to paint not the individual, as such, but the spiritual experience of a whole age, or of mankind. It is not possible that a dramatic figure should be at the same time a symbol and a man entirely of like passions with ourselves. Under these conditions, the wonder is not that Faust has so little unity and reality, but that he has so much; not that he has so few, but so many, points in common with ordinary flesh and blood. Throughout the whole of the first part — and in many scenes of the second, among which the whole of the last act must be included — the character has hardly less of dramatic intensity than of symbolic significance. And that will be admitted even by those who realise the most clearly the full bearing of the opening scenes and their apparent, but only apparent, discrepancy with those that follow.

It may be asked, Why should we go behind the outward letter of this drama? What warrant is there for saying that the personages and incidents are designed to carry a spiritual meaning? To this there are two answers. In the first place, the whole character of the play and its very structure suggest such an interpretation. There is no legitimate reason for the glaring differences between it and other dramas, unless we make some such

assumption. And, though difficult, it is not impossible to work out, to verify, the assumption in detail. And, in the second place, it may fairly be said that we have the authority of Goethe himself, and of those who were best in the position to know Goethe's inner mind, for this interpretation. In proof of this we may appeal to two records.

The first is a piece of high comedy. It is to be found in the collected edition of Goethe's *Conversations*, and is the story of a long discussion between him and Professor Luden, of Jena, on the subject of *Faust*.[1] Luden, who must have been an insufferable puppy, and who ends with informing the author of the exact order in which he had composed the various scenes of the *Fragment*,[2] opened the ball by pouring scorn on his student friends, mostly disciples of Schelling and Wilhelm Schlegel, who had sought to discover a mystical meaning in *Faust*. They had urged that *Faust* was "a *Divina Tragedia*, embodying the spirit of the whole history of the world, embracing the whole life of humanity, past, present, and to

[1] *Goethe's Gespräche* (ed. Biedermann), T. ii. pp. 42-78 (Aug. 19, 1806).

[2] Roughly, it may be said that the *Fragment*, published in 1790, contained the First Scene, down to the exit of Wagner; the scene in Auerbach's Keller; and the whole story of Gretchen. The First Part was not published complete until 1808. It has, besides numerous additions, one important alteration in the order of the scenes. The scene *Wald und Höhle*, which in the *Fragment* came between the scene *Am Brunnen* and Gretchen's prayer to the Virgin, was placed where it now stands, immediately after the scene in Martha's garden. The Second Part was not published till after the poet's death, 1832.

come." Luden had proved, by line and level, that this was "in flat contradiction with the whole nature of tragedy" as set forth by the most approved philosophers, ancient and modern, to say nothing of the whole nature of history, which to man is an undecipherable riddle. "Moreover, what warrant has Faust to call himself the representative of humanity? where are his credentials? and how in the world can he define his relation to the other personages of the drama?" "All that is very well," replied the poet, "but, after all, it is a mere string of negations, and it leads nowhere. Come now, what do you make of the poem yourself?" "Oh, I take it as it is. Without troubling myself over the endless contradictions, I take each character as it stands, and each word in its simple natural sense; and I find it all deeply interesting." "Oh yes! in that way all kinds of bestialities and trivialities might have their interest; but it would be a trivial and disjointed interest. Surely *Faust* must have a higher interest than that —the idea which inspired the poet, which gives unity to the whole, which is the law governing the particulars and giving each of them its significance." "I don't believe that it is to be found in the *Fragment*." "Yet men of talent and learning have felt the need of seeking it. And what has made them feel it? Surely, the *Fragment* itself.

There must be something in the booklet, something running all through it, which points the way to the central thought, the idea which comes everywhere to the surface . . . You yourself seem to attribute the deep interest which *Faust* has aroused not to the work itself, not to the force of its poetry, but to a mystical something which lies behind it. The reader, you seem to say, is attracted not by what is actually given him, but by something which he is impelled to seek and which he is never able to find." After a pause the poet began to turn the tables upon the Professor, poking fun at his calling—he held the chair of History—and mischievously repeating the anecdote of Raleigh throwing the manuscript of his *History* on the fire as a pack of lies. It was as much as to say: "You don't believe in my poem; no more do I in your subject." But all this was lost on the imperturbable self-complacency of the Professor, who—though he had noticed the poet's eyes rolling, as well they might, during the first part of the conversation — came away under the belief that he had made an excellent impression. Throughout, Goethe was manifestly on his guard against showing his hand more than he could help. Yet even so we have a tolerably explicit admission of an "idea which comes everywhere to the surface, of a law which gives significance to each of the details."

This admission is clinched by the second record, which is contained in the Correspondence between Goethe and Schiller. On hearing that Goethe, after an interval of many years, was again busying himself with *Faust*, Schiller wrote to him as follows :[1]— "I will content myself with saying that, with all its poetic individuality, *Faust* cannot entirely set aside the claim to carry with it a symbolic meaning. And that is probably your own conception. The double character of man's nature, his fruitless efforts to blend the divine and the material in his own being—this is never lost sight of. And, as the story passes, and is bound to pass, into the formless and horrible, the reader is not willing to stop short with the outward object, but is led on from and by that object to ideas. In short, the demands on *Faust* are at once philosophical and poetic, and, turn as you will, you will find that the very nature of the object forces on you a philosophical treatment of the matter, and your imagination will have to resign itself to the service of a philosophical idea." To this Goethe replies : "Thank you for your first words on the rising of *Faust* from the dead. We shall assuredly not differ in our conception of the poem. But one comes to a task with quite a fresh spirit when one sees one's own thoughts

[1] *Briefwechsel zwischen Schiller und Goethe*, Letters 331, 332 (June 23, 24, 1797).

and intentions signalised by another mind, and your sympathy is fruitful in more senses than one." From a man who was so habitually shy of explaining or commenting upon his own conceptions, this is very strong testimony. A more complete acceptance of Schiller's interpretation was hardly to be expected.

On the whole, then, we shall not be wrong in concluding that *Faust* has, and is intended to have, a symbolic meaning; that the leading figure in the drama stands for something more than his individual, naked self; that, in some sense, he represents the struggles of the human soul in the quest of completeness and of freedom. And this, as we have seen and as the Professor, a reluctant witness, had the grace to admit, involves an entirely new type of tragic drama.

How, then, does Goethe handle the legend which forms the groundwork of the whole tragedy? The answer is, he recasts it from top to bottom. The primitive and barbaric elements are thrown into the background. It becomes the framework for the poet's own most vital experience, for his reading of the riddle presented by the age in which he lived. The original of the story is as clay in the hands of the potter. There are rejections here, additions there, and a new shape and purpose given to the whole. The boldest of the innovations—an innovation, in all probability, suggested by the legendary

loves of Faust and Helen — is, without doubt, the story of Gretchen; and it is also, without doubt, the highest triumph of the dramatist. Nothing has done so much to win admiration for the poem, and nowhere is that admiration more justly placed. It gives the purely human touch, the touch of passion, which is necessarily wanting to many parts of the drama; and gives it with a genius which, unless we except *Romeo and Juliet*, has never been surpassed.

But, after all, it is not in any single episode that we must look for the full purpose, nor even for the highest originality, of the poem. For these we must look to the drama as a whole, to the genius which lit up a form so beautiful with the inner light of ennobling ideas. The old order—so we may conceive the imagination of the poet as working in its glorious dawn—is breaking to pieces before our eyes, and the individual soul, left without support from others, is driven in upon itself. Man seeks in his own reason a strength which it is powerless to give; until, baffled again and again, he is convinced of the vanity of all knowledge and the futility of all endeavours to pierce behind the veil. Torn by despair, he takes refuge in blind activity, in a reckless passion which sweeps himself and all that is dearest to him into the abyss. Yet in his very defeat he has found a strength unknown to him

before. He has learnt that man does not stand alone, that his lot is inseparably linked with that of his fellows. He has learnt the healing power of action and of renunciation. So strengthened, he throws himself once more on the quest of light and freedom. He braves the terrors of death and of hell itself in the search for ideal beauty—a beauty which the eye of man is powerless to conceive—only to find, as he seizes it, that it fades, like a phantom, in his grasp. Yet once again, he starts upon the old quest, and hurls himself wildly into toil for the service of his fellows. Here, after all his wanderings, he finds something of peace. Here, despite a sharp return of the old reckless self at the very close, he finds freedom and atonement—here, and in the ennobling memory of a great passion, his passion for the woman he had brought to destruction, and who is the first to welcome him among the spirits of the blessed. And the angelic chorus with which the drama closes recalls, so far as such things may, the general purport of the whole :—

> Yonder fleeting world
> Is but a symbol ;
> That which was incomplete
> Here grows to ripeness ;
> That which no tongue can tell
> Here is brought to pass ;
> The eternal spell of womanhood
> Draws us above.

LECTURE X

FUSION OF CLASSICAL AND ROMANTIC TRAGEDY: GOETHE'S *IPHIGENIE*: DRAMAS OF VICTOR HUGO

DURING the generation of Goethe and that which followed, the general flow of the tide was undoubtedly away from classical ideals and towards those which we loosely distinguish as romantic. Yet at the very height of the romantic revival there was, no less undoubtedly, a return upon the classical ideals; not indeed upon the largely spurious classicism of Boileau and the Augustans, but upon the true classicism—the simplicity, the calm, the freshness—of Homer and the Greeks. This reversion to Hellenism plays a large, perhaps a determining, part in the later work of Goethe and Schiller. It makes itself felt also on the corresponding movement of French and English poetry; on the work of Collins, and, at a later period, of Shelley and Keats in the one country; on that of André Chénier, and perhaps even of Chateaubriand, in the other. There is a sense in which we may trace its influence on the

fiery genius of Alfieri. His true kinship is rather with the Greek dramatists than with Racine; rather with Hellenism, or certain aspects of Hellenism, than with the Augustans.

How far this tendency was due to a reaction against romantic workings, how far it represents those workings under another, and a very special form, it is often difficult to say. And this is not the place to enter on the question. We are here concerned not with causes, but with results; not with "streams of tendency," but with certain specific types of drama to which they gave rise. In particular, I shall call your attention to that drama of Goethe, the *Iphigenie*, which, amid glaring differences of form and treatment, approaches most nearly in genius to *Faust*. I shall speak also—though the result was obviously reached by a wholly different path—of the effort made by the great poet of the next generation to overthrow the classical tradition in its stronghold, to revolutionise the tragic drama of France. I refer, I need hardly say, to the dramas of Victor Hugo. Of the two poets, the one approaches classicism from the side of romance; the other reverses the process, and approaches romance from the side of classicism. It is to the former only that the considerations just brought forward immediately apply. But a natural and significant contrast is afforded by the latter.

Iphigenie, though by far the greatest, is by no means the only monument of this phase in the history of the German drama. Much might be said, for instance, of Schiller's classical tragedy, *Die Braut von Messina*, which in respect of form—the retention, for example, of the chorus—adheres much more closely to the Athenian model than anything produced by Goethe. But, while *Die Braut von Messina* is an interesting experiment, the *Iphigenie* is a supreme creation. Of all Goethe's writings, if we except some of the lyrics, it is the most perfect in form; of all, if we except *Faust*, it is the deepest and most moving. What concerns us here, however, is that it stands as a type entirely by itself. In one respect, no doubt, it has close affinities with the play of Schiller to which we have just alluded. Like that, it represents a fusion of the classical form with the romantic spirit. Not only, however, is each of these elements raised to a higher power in the play of Goethe, but the fusion between them is far more complete. While in Schiller's tragedy they meet but refuse to blend, in Goethe's drama they form an inseparable growth, an absolutely harmonious and organic unity. This is the more remarkable when we remember the source from which Goethe drew his material.

The framework of the play is taken direct from the *Iphigenia in Tauris* of Euripides. But as Goethe

had dealt with the medieval matter in *Faust*, so he deals with the classical matter in *Iphigenie*. He retains the classical form; or rather, he raises it to a purity and severity of which there is small trace in his immediate model. But the matter he recasts from top to bottom; he deals with it not as an antiquarian, but as a poet and a creator. To speak with perfect plainness, he literally turns it inside out. What in Euripides takes the foremost place, the outward incidents and circumstances, with him fades into the background. What in Euripides is of little or no moment—the inward conflict, the strife of motive and emotion, the struggle in the heart of the heroine between desire and duty—to Goethe becomes the dominant theme of the whole drama; that on which the imagination is centred from beginning to end. And the conflict on which our attention is thus fastened is among the deepest, the most inward, which it is possible to conceive. The last word, throughout the whole play, is said not by passion, nor by desire nor by reason, but by instinct. Instinct, the dim instinct of a woman's heart—that is the true hero of the piece. Nothing could well be more opposed to the spirit of the ancients; nothing could be more essentially modern—in the widest sense, more romantic—than this. Yet it is precisely this which Goethe has chosen to embody in a purely classical form. And the calm to which the heroine attains by

following the promptings of instinct, when both reason and interest seem to be dead against them, finds a fitter expression in the noble severity of the classical model than it could easily have found in the more impassioned utterance of romance. It is there that the genius of the poet found the meeting-point between his form and his matter. Or rather, it was the calm which breathed from his conception of the matter that took shape, naturally and instinctively, in the form best adapted to express it.

The classical form, it need hardly be said, presented at least one acute difficulty; and with this difficulty Goethe was not slow to grapple. Is it possible for the modern stage to reproduce the Chorus? or failing that, can anything be found which may fairly be regarded as an equivalent for it? Schiller, as we have seen, accepted the former alternative, and he can hardly be said to have succeeded. Goethe made a bold attempt in the direction of the latter. The Chorus itself, his instinct rightly told him, was inadmissible. But the lyric element, which may be described as the basis of the Chorus, might find a natural place, even under the conditions of the modern stage. In no fewer than four scencs of *Iphigenie* do such lyrical passages—lyrical not only in substance but in form—occur; and in each case the experiment is amply justified by the result. The prayer of Iphigenie at

the end of the first act, the vision of Orestes near the end of the third, the praise of the constancy of Pylades at the beginning of the fourth, and, above all, the song of the Parcæ at its close—the effect of all these is very striking; that of Orestes' vision and the song of the Parcæ is overwhelming. The lyric form adopted by the poet in all is the unrhymed rhythmical movement employed in some of his reflective poems (*Das Göttliche*, for instance); and it is clear that such a form suited his purpose better than any rhymed stanza could possibly have done. The contrast with the blank verse of the main body of the drama is less abrupt; and, in Goethe's hands at any rate, the rhythmical effect is more majestic and severe.

The play of Euripides from which *Iphigenie* is drawn is far from being one of his best. To an extent unusual even with him, it is concerned with purely outward incident and description. The recognition between brother and sister—a theme in which, to judge from the remarks of Aristotle, the Greek mind was apt to take a childish delight —is immeasurably spun out. There are two Messengers' speeches; one near the beginning describing the discovery of the two strangers by the herdsmen, the other near the close, describing their hurried flight with Iphigenia and the image, and the storm which beat them back upon the

inhospitable shore; while, to crown all, there is a goddess *ex machina*, who descends to square all differences and to cut all inconvenient knots at the finish. In the *Iphigenie* all this ornate scaffolding is thrown to the winds. The core of the action, up to the last act, is retained. But, no longer an end in itself, it becomes merely the starting-point for a mortal conflict in the heart of the heroine, a conflict on the one hand between her gratitude to Thoas and the inner voice which warns her that, as she cannot return his love, she has no right to sacrifice her freedom; a conflict on the other hand between her desire to save her brother and the instinct which forbids her to deceive or betray the man who had shown her kindness. In the last act, the original incidents are changed out of all knowledge. The solution is found, not in the flight of the heroine and the mechanical intervention of the goddess, but in Iphigenia's sudden remorse, in her brave avowal of the plot, and in the magnanimous self-effacement of the king. Who can doubt for a moment that Goethe chose the nobler way, or that the nobler way was also the more moving and the more dramatic?

This will best be seen by a brief account of the plot. The starting-point of the story is the familiar legend of the sacrifice of Iphigenia. When the fleet of the Greeks was about to set sail for Troy, it was

suddenly becalmed. The curse, said the soothsayers, could only be removed if the king's daughter were sacrificed to appease the wrath of Heaven. Agamemnon, in bitterness of heart, at last consents. But at the moment when the knife is laid at her throat, Iphigenia is miraculously saved by the goddess Artemis, and borne off in secret to her temple in Tauris. There for many years she lives as priestess to the goddess, befriended by the king of the land, Thoas, over whom she wins a deep influence and whom she even induces to abandon the barbarous custom of sacrificing all strangers, which from time immemorial had been the law of the land.

All this is presupposed. At the point when the play opens, Thoas returns in triumph from the war in which he had taken vengeance on a neighbouring tribe for the slaughter of his son; he seeks an interview with Iphigenie, to implore her once again to accept the love which he had long offered her, and to become his wife. Prompted by an instinct which she can hardly justify even to herself, she refuses. She shrinks from wedding herself to a man she does not love. She shrinks from sacrificing for ever all hope of return to her own land and kin. In order to clinch the refusal, she reveals to Thoas, what hitherto she had concealed, the story of her birth and of the curse that hangs upon her house. But nothing

can soften the refusal to the king's ears. Deeply wounded, he is convinced that a curse rests upon himself and all his designs. And, to propitiate the gods, he resolves—as Iphigenie had been warned was probable—to renew the law of sacrifice ; to renew it upon two strangers who have just been cast ashore.

They are Orestes, the brother of Iphigenie, and his friend Pylades. They have made their way to Tauris in obedience to the oracle of Apollo, who has bidden Orestes "bring his sister from Tauris back to Greece" ; and this is interpreted by Orestes to mean the image of Artemis, Apollo's sister, in the temple of Tauris. Each of the two strangers in turn is brought before the priestess, and a recognition ultimately follows. But the mind of Orestes, pursued by the avenging spirits of his mother, gives way beneath the strain. As Iphigenie reveals herself to him, the old madness sweeps upon him, and in bitter irony he calls on her to complete the doom of the house of Atreus and to lift the knife against her brother, as he had lifted it against their mother, as *she* had lifted it against her husband. The fit at length passes. Orestes and Pylades declare the purpose of their coming ; and the three plan to escape, carrying with them the sacred image of the goddess. The two friends depart to make preparations. Iphigenie

remains to secure the image and throw dust in the eyes of the king.

Thoas soon appears, to reproach the priestess with delay. Putting force on herself, she tells the falsehood agreed upon with Pylades. But, as she tells it, her innate nobility rises in revolt. Throwing all self-interest and all prudence to the winds, she confesses the whole truth and casts herself, and with herself all that is dear to her, upon his mercy. She reminds him that he had sworn, if the means should ever offer, to restore her to her home and people. Thoas, deeply moved, appears about to yield, when Orestes, with his sword drawn, suddenly returns, followed by Pylades and his other comrades. Cut to the quick, the king turns passionately upon him, and the cup of hope seems dashed to the ground for ever. At length, won by the undaunted bravery of the youth, he professes himself ready to forgive all — all except the attempted sacrilege against the goddess. "The image, O King," is the answer of Orestes, "shall sow no strife between us. My eyes are opened, and I see it was my own sister the god bade me fetch from Tauris. Let her be given to me, and let all else be forgotten. Nobly she has trusted thee; let her trust be as nobly answered." Here Iphigenie takes up the appeal :—

Think on thy plighted troth, and let thy soul
Be moved by his true words and loyal heart!
Nay, look us in the face! A golden hour
Is thine, to grasp the chance of golden deeds.
Refuse it canst thou not, then grasp it soon!

Thoas (*with face averted*). So go then!

Iphigenie. Not so, my king; not thus! Without thy blessing,
With thine ill-will, I may not part from thee.
Banish us not! Oh, let a bond of kindness
Be knit between us! So shall we not for ever
Be parted, torn asunder. Dear and precious,
Even as my father was, art thou to me,
And ever in my soul abides thine image.
Let but the humblest of thy people bear
Back to my ear the echo of that voice
Which, day by day, I caught once from thy lips;
Clothed in thy garb let but the poorest seek me,
And I will greet him even as a god.
With my own hands will I prepare his bed,
By my own hearth will I draw close his seat,
And ask of nought but thee and of thy doings.
My prayers plead for thee with the gods. Thy goodness,
As is most just, may they reward with blessings!
Farewell! Oh, turn thy face on us, and give
A gracious word of parting, answering mine!
So shall the wind blow softlier on our sails,
The tears will flow more healing from our eyes,
As the land fades. Farewell! Let thy right hand,
In pledge of the old bond, be clasped in mine!

Thoas (*turning and clasping her hand*). Farewell!

Even in a poor translation, the force of the closing passage will be more or less apparent. Much more, remember, in the original. I have quoted it, however, not only on account of its intrinsic beauty, but as the crowning example of

the dominant quality which runs through the whole drama; the blending, that is, of outward calm and intense emotion within; the fusion of the classical form — simple, self-restrained, austere — with the fervour and inwardness, the "soul," as Schiller called it, of romance. It is this that sets *Iphigenie* wholly apart from all other dramas. In some rare instances the same fusion has been attempted. Never, to the best of my knowledge, has it been achieved.

Before Goethe died some of the most striking dramas of Hugo had already been published.[1] And a notice of *Cromwell*—not, it must be admitted, in any way enthusiastic—is to be found among the Reviews which prove that the old poet kept his eyes open to all that was important in the literature of Europe, and indeed of an area much wider than Europe, to the very end.[2] The contrast between *Iphigenie* and the dramas of the French poet is about as complete as it is possible to conceive. The one embodies what may fairly be called a romantic matter in a form which has all the simplicity and severity of the classical model. The form of the other is, in the main, violently

[1] The dates are as follows: *Cromwell*, 1827; *Hernani*, 1830; *Marion Delorme*, 1831 (written 1829); *Le Roi s'amuse*, 1832; *Lucrèce Borgia*, 1833; *Marie Tudor*, 1833; *Angelo*, 1835; *Ruy Blas*, 1838; *Les Burgraves*, 1843.

[2] *Auswärtige Litteratur*, Werke T. xxix. (Ed. Cotta, 1868), p. 88. He unequivocally condemned *Hernani*.

romantic; but, in spite of all the poet's efforts, it is still largely tinged with the classical spirit, and presents unmistakable survivals of the classical form.

The revolt against the classical drama in France had begun soon after the middle of the eighteenth century. Critics, such as Mercier, had denounced the old type of tragedy as hollow and lifeless.[1] Dramatists—Diderot, M. J. Chénier, and others—had attempted to reform it; to reform it, either by bringing it nearer to common experience, or by giving it more of action and of colour. Shakespeare, much to the wrath of Voltaire, was translated bodily and exalted as the "god of the theatre," as the model whom none could approach, but in whose steps all ought to follow.[2] Before the end of the century all his tragedies had been adapted—"translated," after the fashion of Bottom—for the French stage; and in this guise—one of the strangest travesties in the records of literature—had been received with no little applause.[3] The old classical tragedy was shaken on its throne. The way was prepared for any revolutionary chieftain who had the courage and genius to grasp the sceptre.

[1] See Mercier, *Essai sur l'art dramatique* (1773); *Essai sur la Littérature et les Littérateurs* (1778).

[2] See the account of Letourneur's Translation (1776-81) in M. Jusserand's *Shakespeare en France*, pp. 301-320.

[3] See the account of Ducis' adaptations (1769-92); *ib.* pp. 333-352.

Among the remarkable dramatists who led the campaign against the classical tradition, the most remarkable, it need hardly be said, was Victor Hugo. The brief triumph of romantic tragedy (1830-40) was mainly due to his genius, and its history is inseparably bound up with his name. It was he who crystallised the theory of the romantic rebellion in the Preface to *Cromwell* (1827). It was he who, in a succession of dramas (1830-43) attempted—but with many lapses from fidelity—to put the theory into practice. The very infidelities of the attempt, however, are that which, for our immediate purpose, give it significance. It is just because he was unable wholly to shake off the traditions, in which he and the spectators who thronged to hear his pieces had been reared, that he represents so curious—and, when all abatements have been made, so memorable—a phase in the history of tragic drama. I will first give a slight sketch of the more crucial parts of the theory, and then go on to ask how far the subsequent dramas can be said to have carried it into effect.

The history of imaginative thought—argues the poet, giving the widest possible scope to his inquiry—naturally falls into three periods; the primitive, the classical, and the modern, or Christian. The characteristic form of the first period is the lyric;

that of the second, the epic; that of Christendom, the drama. It was, indeed, Christianity, with its revelation of the double nature of man—the higher and the lower, the soul and the body — that first made the drama, in any full sense of the term, a possibility. For the drama depends on contrast; and it is only in Christian times that the full meaning of that contrast, and of the harmony which results from it, has been realised.[1] Bearing this in mind, we shall see at once how empty and barren a thing the modern classical drama, with its "one or two characters, abstract types of a purely metaphysical idea," must inevitably be;[2] how false, its avowed ambition to present nothing but the sublime and the beautiful, to banish all that is ugly, grotesque, or "common."[3] The fact is that the beautiful can never attain its full effect unless by contrast with that which is not in itself beautiful; that the grotesque and the ugly are the foils which are needed to throw it into relief. The fact further is, that the real aim of art is not so much beauty as truth, or fidelity to nature; that no art is complete which does not embody all sides of nature, the ugly as well as the beautiful, the grotesque as well as the sublime; that "everything

[1] *Préface de Cromwell*, pp. 12-17, 30, 31. The references are to the large 8vo. edition, *Ne Varietur*.

[2] Throughout, Hugo distinguishes between the *modern* classical drama and the Greek; e.g. *ib.* pp. 35, 36.

[3] *Ib.* pp. 67, 68.

which is found in nature is found in art also."[1] Not, indeed, that art is a mere copy of nature. If that were so, from the very conditions of the case the copy, like objects reflected in a flat mirror, would inevitably fall short of the original. It is only by deepening the lines and heightening the colours—in one word, by idealising—that the spirit of the original, as opposed to its dead letter, can be preserved.[2] Hence the error of that false romanticism, the mocking travesty of the true, which seeks to reproduce nature, and nothing more, which adopts the methods and ideals of realism. Its results may be less disastrous than those of classicism; but none the less, it is a delusion.[3] With this limitation and this warning, it remains true that the aim of art — and, in particular, of the drama — is rather truth than beauty; that it is "the characteristic rather than the beautiful" which it should strive to reproduce.[4]

This at once brings us to the absurdity of the rules by which the classical tradition has tied and bound the freedom of art, and of the drama in particular. As a general principle, it may be laid down that there are no rules, save, on the one hand, those which are imposed by the nature of art in general—those, namely, which are determined

[1] *Préface de Cromwell*, pp. 17-26, 31.
[2] *Ib.* pp. 46-48.
[3] *Ib.* pp. 46, 53, 71.
[4] *Ib.* pp. 49.

by the very scope and mission of art, and which have been roughly indicated above; and, on the other hand, those which are imposed by the nature of the particular subject chosen by the artist, and which, except for that particular subject, are of no validity whatsoever.[1] Apart from these two restrictions, the artist has absolute freedom; and it is his right to give free play to his own individuality. His very defects, as we may see from Shakespeare, are commonly inseparable from his greatness.[2]

But, if rules in general are pernicious, what are we to say of the particular rules which classical tradition has forced upon the drama, the laws of the unities? The two narrower unities, those round which the battle has most hotly raged—the unities of time and place—must be unhesitatingly rejected. They are illogical in themselves, and disastrous in their results. Nothing has done so much to destroy the drama, to rob it of all action and all passion, as their observance.[3] The unity of action, on the other hand, is among the principles which lie in the very nature of art. It must, no less certainly, remain. It must, however, be understood in a sense very different from that given to it by the classical critics. It must not be confounded with simplicity. Secondary plots,

[1] *Préface de Cromwell*, pp. 46-48. [2] *Ib.* pp. 71-73. [3] *Ib.* pp. 34-38.

episodes, multiplicity of characters — all these give life and truth to the drama. So far from impairing the true unity, the unity of general effect, they enhance it. Above all, let the "relation" be jealously banished. Let the whole action be transacted before the eyes of the spectator, and let it be given without stint. The classical drama shows only the "elbows of action"; let the reformed drama exhibit the hand which strikes the blow, and the victim who falls beneath it.[1]

It remains only to speak of the style at which the dramatist should aim. Verse or prose — that is a secondary question.[2] But, on the whole, verse —the verse rather of Molière than of Racine—is to be preferred. It is more solid; it gives the thought a more sensible, a more tangible, form. But the verse which is to adapt itself to the drama must be handled with the utmost freedom. It must never scruple to call things by their right name; it must avoid periphrasis and inversion. It must be capable of passing naturally "from comedy to tragedy, from the sublime to the grotesque." It must lend itself without effort to the given action and the given personage. It must avoid "tirades," it must find its home, above all, in dialogue. "It must master the secret of taking a thousand different

[1] *Préface de Cromwell*, pp. 35 and 38.

[2] Three of Hugo's own dramas—among them, *Lucrèce Borgia*—are written in prose.

forms without losing its character or type. It must be lyric, epic, dramatic, according to the need of the moment." Poetical it will assuredly be; but, so to speak, "by accident and in spite of itself." And its poetry will not be "descriptive," after the manner of Delille—as we might say, of Thomson or Erasmus Darwin—but essentially "picturesque." [1]

The chief points in this vigorous attack—an attack which takes up the text much where it had been left by Mercier—are not difficult to pick out. They may perhaps be reduced to three: the assault upon the rules, the assertion that the chief aim of poetry is fidelity to nature, and the doctrine of style which the author bases on the freedom of the poet from all except the service of nature. In these, and the consequences he draws from these, the whole force of his theory may be said to lie. And by these his practical achievement in tragic drama may not unfairly be judged.

First, then, for the attack upon the rules. Here it is manifest that the work of the poet was, in the first instance, purely negative. And, as far as the unities of time and place are concerned, it may be urged that the cause was already decided. That, however, was far from being the case in France, where, up to the time when the *Préface* was written, none but the most timid violations of the "absurd"

[1] *Préface de Cromwell*, pp. 51-55.

laws had been attempted. And, even had the issue been far more certain than it was, who would have been willing to lose the resounding blows dealt against the ancient "pedantries" by Hugo? More novel are his comments upon the unity of action; and it will be observed that, while accepting it (as, in some sense, he was bound to do), he gives it the widest possible interpretation; an interpretation which was specially designed to cover Shakespeare, and which hardly excluded even *Faust*. The importance of this it is impossible to exaggerate. The unity of action, understood in the rigid sense, was in fact, the stronghold of the classical theory. To assail it was to assail the real key to the classical position. The two other unities, galling as they were, were little more than outposts. If they were surrendered, it by no means followed that the citadel which they protected would fall. If it were taken, they were inevitably carried in its train. It is not the least of Hugo's services that he was among the first to recognise this, and to distinguish sharply between the more and the less rigid, between the false and the true, construction of the unity of action.

As for his own practice on these points, it need hardly be said that he persistently disregards the unities of time and place. Whether he was equally free in handling the unity of action, is a more

doubtful matter. Episodes there are in abundance —the conspiracy against Don Carlos in *Hernani*, the scene with the strolling players in *Marion Delorme*, the scene of the slaves in *Les Burgraves*; and they are commonly of a highly romantic type. But, except in *Cromwell*, which was never intended for the stage, and *Les Burgraves*, which was a colossal failure on the stage, the general effect is rather that of a structure closely knit, than the reverse. The plot is, after all, the first care of the poet; and wide as may be the space allowed for it in comparison with the classical drama, this in itself is enough to exclude that free expansion of character which was the chief gain drawn by Shakespeare from the loose structure of romance. That, however, is perhaps only to say—what, in other respects also, would be true—that the dramas of Hugo approach more nearly to the Spanish type of romance than to the English. Shakespeare may have presided over his theory; in practice he ranges himself rather under the banner of Calderon. Let it be added that the plot is commonly managed with inimitable skill; that it is dominated by a rigid sequence of cause and effect; that from the first scene to the last—we have only to think of *Lucrèce Borgia* or *Le Roi s'amuse*—the characters are presented as struggling in the toils of an inexorable fate.

We pass to the second question raised by the

redoubtable *Preface*. Starting from the assertion that art—and, above all, dramatic art—depends on the contrast between the grotesque and the beautiful, Hugo is led on step by step to the conclusion that art must reflect all sides of nature, that "everything which is found in nature is found in art also." In other words, and with the restrictions pointed out above, the secret of art is fidelity to nature. Here, it must be confessed, the practice of the dramatist presents results strangely different from those which are suggested by his theory. Once again, Shakespeare presides over the theory. And once again—but in a far more disastrous fashion—the practice was guided by a very different inspiration. A glance at his treatment of "contrast" will suffice. Here, in a certain sense, he leaves nothing to be desired. Take each play in turn, and we shall find that the central figure is the living embodiment of a contrast between the grotesque and the sublime, between the beautiful and the ugly, an antithesis in flesh and blood. In *Marion Delorme* it is a courtesan who is won to chastity by love for a pure-minded man; in *Le Roi s'amuse*, a cynical pander, who is redeemed by a single-hearted devotion to his daughter; in *Lucrèce Borgia*, a murderess, who is lifted out of herself by an adoring love for her son. And so on, through the whole gallery of plays, with the possible exception of *Hernani*. It would be the

height of injustice to deny that there is dramatic force, to deny that there is moral truth, in such a conception. Such characters have been known; and, within measure, they are fit subjects for tragic drama. But, when they reappear in play after play, when the whole world appears to be peopled by these anomalies, the strain on the faith of the spectator becomes more than can be borne. His imagination, as well as his reason, rises in revolt. Nor can it even be said that each of these curiosities, taken singly, is painted in such a way as to convince. All shades and half-lights are deliberately banished. Every device is exhausted to throw the two sides of the character into the sharpest possible contrast, to make each stand out, over against the other, in the strongest possible relief. The method is, in fact, the very reverse of that by which Shakespeare wrought out his great creations—the tragic contrasts involved in the characters of Hamlet or Macbeth. There everything is shaded; there we have an infinity of gradations; there we pass by a thousand subtle transitions from one mood of the hero to its apparent opposite. The Elizabethan is at as much pains to soften the contrast as the Frenchman is to sharpen it and to heighten its effect. Of nature there is no thought in all this display of warring opposites. The poet has followed the methods of satire rather than of the drama. He has given us

only the antithesis; he has forgotten the underlying harmony on which it depends not only for its dramatic effect, but for the very possibility of its existence.

The same appears in the style which is characteristic of these dramas, and which, even apart from its intrinsic beauty, is notable as an exact reflection of the matter. No doubt, in many passages—for instance, in the first act of *Marion Delorme*—the poet attains that easy transition from the style of comedy to that of tragedy which the *Preface* had proclaimed as his ideal. And that in itself, without regard to the more technical aspects of the versification, would suffice to make these plays a landmark in the history of French tragedy. But, if we turn to the distinctively tragic passages, to those where the whole soul of the poet manifestly finds utterance, we are met with just those declamations, those "tirades," which the *Preface* had denounced. The great monologue of Charles V. at the tomb of Charlemagne, the fiery outburst of Ruy Blas against the baseness of Don Salluste, are only two instances out of a whole sheaf. As declamations, they are magnificent. But that they are declamations—as the corresponding passages of Shakespeare, or Calderon, or Goethe, are not—is hardly to be denied. The very antithesis, which we have already seen in the characters themselves, re-

appears, chiselled and polished to the utmost, in their words. The crowning stroke of Ruy Blas—

J'ai l'habit d'un laquais, mais vous en avez l'âme—

what are we to call an antithesis, if this is not ?

The truth is that, with all his contempt for the classical drama, Hugo was never able to escape from its methods and ideals. His characters, though in a very different way, are hardly less "abstract and metaphysical" than those of Corneille or Voltaire. His set speeches only differ from theirs in being yet more declamatory, yet more completely in the nature of "tirades." Despite the romantic tissue and the romantic drapery, the classical skeleton, some critics have found, formed the framework of his poetic genius. As a general description, this is disputable, and more than disputable. But if we limit it to his dramatic genius—for here too, with all its blemishes, the genius is unmistakable—it is not altogether unjust. What the Preface to *Cromwell* had demanded —and what *Cromwell* itself, in spite of youthful crudenesses, had gone far to supply—was a complete revolt from the classical tradition. It was something concrete, human and dramatic; something which should frankly give the contradictions of man's nature, but at the same time reconcile them and harmonise them; something essentially spontaneous,

natural and real. What the later dramas offer—let this be at once admitted—is the passion in which classical tragedy was commonly weak, and the action in which it was altogether lacking. There was the real advance of Hugo, as against his classical enemies. There he ranges himself side by side with the Elizabethans and the Spaniards. But when we come to the other crucial demands of the drama—demands which, in theory, none had recognised more clearly or put forward more trenchantly than he—we find that his conception of character has all the abstraction, and his style more than all the rhetoric, of the classics. This may go far to account for the rapid discredit which fell on the romantic drama of France.

Not, of course, that this is the only source of the weakness which mingles with the strength of these dramas, and which does much to mar their effect. On the contrary, some of the defects flow clearly from the opposite quarter; from the restlessness, the melodramatic instinct, the craving for startling incident and overstrained sentiment, which were part of the heritage of romance—of romance, as it took shape in the French revival of 1830. These were the qualities on which the hostile critics of the time fastened most eagerly, and which provoked the classical reaction of the following years. And, naturally enough, they threw all else into the shade. None the less, it is well to observe the unconscious workings of

the classical influence upon the man whose avowed mission was to break its power; to mark how that influence acted partly in opposition to, partly in concert with, the promptings of romance; to remind ourselves how hard it is for any poet—most of all, perhaps, any dramatic poet—to free himself entirely from the traditions which have wound themselves around the art of his age and country, and in which he himself has been brought up.

Yet who, that has ever felt their spell, would part from these dramas without paying tribute to their extraordinary power? In mastery of situation they are almost without a rival. They have some of the great qualities alike of lyric and of epic. Where, except in *Romeo and Juliet*, shall we find so lyrical an expression of undying love as in *Hernani*? Where, through the whole history of the drama, shall we meet such epic genius—such genius for bringing the struggles of a whole epoch before the imagination—as in some scenes of *Hernani* and *Les Burgraves*? Such scenes form a fitting prelude to *La Légende des Siècles*. Much in the tragedies of Hugo is melodrama unabashed; much is rhetorical, feverish, unnatural; but I prefer to think of their great qualities, rather than of their defects.

LECTURE XI

SOME TYPES OF RECENT DRAMA: BROWNING, MAETERLINCK, IBSEN

In the drama of the last seventy years we may trace two streams of tendency. There is, on the one hand, the stream of romance, of a pronounced and perhaps extreme idealism. On the other hand there is, now for the first time in the history of tragedy, an equally marked tendency towards realism. In the summary account which is all that time allows us, it is only possible to take two or three figures among the host of claimants who present themselves; Browning and Maeterlinck on the side of romance, Ibsen on that of realism; or what, with the limitations to be indicated directly, may pass for realism.

Let us first consider the general development, during this period, of idealism or romance. Roughly, it may be said that the general tendency, a tendency observable in each of our typical figures, is to drive the dramatic motive still further inward, to make it still more immaterial, still more subtle, than it had

ever been before. The earlier phases of romance, as we have seen, had shifted the centre of gravity from action to character. The later phases, the phases with which we are now to deal, shift it still further backwards; from the outworks of character, those aspects of it which stand in the closest connection with action and issue most immediately in action, to its inmost citadel, to those regions where it withdraws most completely within itself. And this process is carried yet further by Maeterlinck than by Browning.

In Browning perhaps the first thing to strike us is the marked stress laid on the situation, and the peculiar way in which the situation is handled. The situation is no longer the scene of a particular, definite train of outward incidents or circumstances; nor does it lead, as it led in earlier dramatists, to a particular, definite issue in outward action. It is created, so to speak, from within; by the particular temperament, the unconscious, impalpable instincts, of a given group of characters. It is a far more intangible thing in its texture, and far more fleeting in its duration. It is a matter not of years, or months, or weeks, as it is with Shakespeare; but of a day, an hour, even a moment—as in *Luria*, and *In a Balcony*, and *Pippa Passes*. It is a light suddenly flashed upon the soul, and then, as suddenly, withdrawn.

And this peculiarity in the handling of the situa-

tion leads to a peculiarity no less marked in the presentation of character. Character is no longer regarded as something fixed and stable. It would not even be enough to say that it is presented in growth. It is rather in flux that Browning conceives of it, and paints it; as changing with each change of the situation; as unfolding to an utterly new life at the call of some strange experience which confronts it. We may compare it to a stream which reflects the ever-changing aspect of the banks on each side of it, and of the sky above it; or to some tropical plant leaping upwards to meet the light that pours through an opening in the forest roof which overhangs it. The situation is the crucial moment which tests character to the uttermost, which reveals qualities hitherto unknown and unsuspected, which brings to the surface strains that might otherwise have been permanently choked. The surprise of the one is answered by a surprise no less astonishing in the other. So it is, if we may illustrate from a play which is not a tragedy, with *Colombe's Birthday*; so, to take the poet's more sombre pieces, with *In a Balcony* and, above all, with *Pippa Passes*.

In the first of these, a mere girl, light-hearted and utterly without experience, is called on to thread her way through a web of intrigue woven round her by the greed and craft of others. With no clue but her own rectitude and nobility, she at once rises to the

trial, reads into the heart of the courtiers and the suitors whom chance has thrown in her path, discerns the noble from the base, and sacrifices all to choose the one and reject the dazzling offers of the other. Between the dawn and the nightfall of a single day, the fate of a lifetime is decided. It is the same with *In a Balcony*. The obliquity of Constance, her preference for crooked paths, sets in motion a train of circumstance which none could have foreseen. Within the space of two hours, the queen has wakened to a life of passionate love, she herself and her almost innocent lover are swept into the abyss; but from despair itself she has drawn a strength and sincerity of which but an hour before she was utterly incapable. But the strongest instance is to be found in *Pippa Passes*, where the matter is no less original than the dramatic method and the structure. This play, it need hardly be said, is, in reality, four separate plays strung into one. The connecting link is the sudden flash of light which the "passing" of a pure-hearted girl flashes upon the base or distorted passions of four disconnected groups of men and women, the sudden revulsion of purpose which her joyous song brings to the heart of each, as it strikes upon their ear. The fountain of shame or remorse is instantaneously unsealed. It is the work, not of a day nor of an hour, but of a single moment.

In all this we notice a marked affinity—it would

hardly be too much to say, an identity—of method with the more lyrical pieces of the poet; with *Cristina*, or *The Worst of it*, or *A Last Ride Together*. And if, in one sense, it may be said that the method is more legitimate in the lyric than the drama, it must in fairness be remembered that in the dramas—and this applies even to *Pippa Passes*—the way to the transition from mood to mood is prepared with a subtlety which, in the narrower limits of the lyric, is manifestly impossible. The lyrics, no doubt, are, as the author calls them, essentially "dramatic." But the plays, besides their lyric note of concentrated passion, have an inwardness of dramatic motive, a swift play of thought and feeling, such as had been attempted by no previous dramatist, and is only to be realised by an incessant strain on the imagination of the spectator or the reader. Their pith lies in the swift passage from passion to passion, from emotion to emotion. These vary with every turn of the circumstances, and are often to be gathered only from a chance word, or look, or gesture. It is probable that no dramatist has ever made such heavy demands upon the intelligence of actor and spectator.

It is easy to see that such a method stands in the closest possible connection with the author's whole conception of human character, with his deliberate judgment of that which does, and that which does not, count in the tangle of men's

conduct and motives. To Browning, it need hardly be said, it is not the outward act which counts, but the inward motive; not the conscious motive, we may even say, but the whole tissue of instinct, thought, feeling, and passion, which we sum up under the vague word character. It is the "Thoughts hardly to be packed Into the narrow act"; it is "The seed of the act, God holds appraising in His hollow palm, Not act grown great thence on the world below"; it is "The soul o' the purpose, ere it is shaped in act, Takes flesh i' the world and clothes itself a king"; it is by such tests as these that he judges the men and women who throng his dramas and his poems. And if, more than any other modern dramatist, he is apt to pick one act out of a lifetime and by that one act pass judgment on the whole character, that is because it is, or is assumed to be, a crucial act; one so decisive as to sum up all that is essential in the life of the past, and to carry in it the germ and sap of all the future. Such acts, just because they make demands on the whole man, are, in Browning's view, a truer test of character than the dull routine of daily life, which at the best draws only on fragments of the man and may never reach the true man at all. The crucial act, on the other hand, if selected with just insight and laid before us in all its bearings, in all the fleeting phases through which the soul passes in bringing it to accomplish-

ment, leads us at once face to face with the true self and enables us to pass judgment on its worth. To do this, to enlist the aid of the reader or spectator in doing it, is the main object of all Browning's work; or rather, of that part of it with which alone we are here concerned. It is the object, above all, of his dramas. Hence, on the one hand, the supreme stress which he lays on the situation, upon the circumstance, or train of circumstance, which for the moment arrests the flux of thought, feeling, instinct, passion which we describe as "character." Hence, on the other hand, the extreme subtlety and inwardness of his dramatic method.

There is, however, one play in which, to a large extent, he drops this particular method, and approaches character from a different side. This is *Luria*, which is perhaps the finest of all his tragedies, and which, as we shall see, presents a curious resemblance to the method distinctive of our next dramatist, Maeterlinck. Here it is not the subtle play of character upon character which Browning sets himself to render. The characters, indeed, remain unchanged—remain, we may almost say, as fixed types—from the beginning till the great revulsion which comes upon all save one of them at the close. The real interest of the drama lies in the bare opposition of type to type; in the tragedy which the incapacity of the one to understand the other

inevitably brings forth. The outward circumstances of the play resemble in some measure those of *Othello*. Othello is the "Moor of Venice"; Luria might be described as the Moor of Florence. But if in subject the two dramas are akin, in method of treatment they are utterly different. In Shakespeare the loneliness of the Moor, the natural barrier between him and the woman with whom his fortunes are linked, though it was certainly not overlooked by the dramatist, is kept markedly, perhaps deliberately, in the background. The theme of the play is a passion which may draw additional strength from the accidents of birth, but which might have existed, and has often existed, in complete independence of them. In that passion the whole nature of the hero—his frankness, his nobility, his heroism, his openness to remorse—finds burning utterance. His jealousy is as the jealousy of other men, save that it is purged of all that is low and creeping, it is more intense, more fiery, more impassioned than theirs. How different is the conception of *Luria*! There everything is reduced to the most abstract shape; to the bald antagonism between the two irreconcilable temperaments, the temperament of the East and that of the North; the one frank, impetuous, ardent in devotion; the other cold, calculating, ruthless. Before this racial hostility all merely personal differences melt into nothing. It is on the antagonism of blood and

instinct that our eye is fixed from beginning to end. The whole tragedy flows from this fountain; and the antagonism is not overcome until it is too late. Now it is manifest that this carries us a stage further, to a region yet more inward, because more instinctive and more unconscious, than that of the previous plays. Braccio, the moving spirit in the conspiracy against Luria, may calculate probabilities. But this, as he himself confesses, is mere logical fencing. In the end he perpetually falls back on the blind instinct from which he started; on the unreasoning hatred of Florentine for barbarian, on the fixed resolve that, at all costs, intellect shall rule, that the sword, after it has done its work of brute beast, shall be broken in pieces. And the same thing, though in a very different fashion, is true of Luria. With blind devotion, and in spite of countless warnings, he continues to adore Florence, to cherish the dream of the reward that awaits him at her hands, until her treachery is proved beyond dispute and no choice is left him but to take vengeance or to die. But, inward as is the region in which the struggle is played out, it is for that very reason an invisible struggle. The situation once given, there is nothing more to be said. The characters speak to give utterance to their instincts, to find expression for their temperament, and nothing more. Not only is there no action, but there is no motion, in the drama

until the great revulsion of the close. The situation, till that moment, remains without change and without modification. There is no room for the dramatic subtlety, for the ceaseless play of thought and feeling, of character upon character, which is so notable in the dramatist's other plays. And that perhaps is the reason why *Luria* remains a solitary example of this particular method. It is as though Browning instinctively felt that it was, in itself, a perilous method; as he must certainly have been aware that it cut him off from the use of those powers in which his genius was strongest, of those weapons in which long training had given him most skill.

For our purposes, however, the significant thing is that, in *Luria* as in the rest of his dramatic work, though doubtless in a very different way, Browning is feeling after new methods and attempting to direct the drama into new paths. And in one sense or another, the novelty lies in the greater inwardness and subtlety of the method, in the endeavour to drive the dramatic motive further back, from action to character, from the outer regions of character into the inmost recesses of the heart. In *Luria*, as in the other plays, the drama is transacted not in the field of action, but in the inner workings of the soul. There the struggle is to the last degree poignant; there it is intensely real. The one doubt

which suggests itself is: How can a theme, so remote from the world of sense, be brought home to the bodily senses? How can motives so spiritual be made visible and palpable before the footlights? And it may well be that the poet has here attempted to force the stage beyond what it can endure, that he has striven to bring upon it more than it is able to hold. For acting purposes, it is probable that his dramas, even if angels were the performers, would never completely satisfy; that they are fitted rather for the reader than the spectator, rather for the closet than the stage.

With our other example, Maeterlinck, this is still more obviously the case. Here the dramatic motive is driven a degree, perhaps several degrees, more inward yet. It is not action, it is not even motive, nor, in the ordinary sense, character which he brings before us. It is rather that which lies behind both conscious motive and character as formed by will or deliberate purpose. It is character in its most elemental and unalterable shape, the temperament which comes to man by birth, the fixed mood which he inherits from nature. Upon character, in this sense, outward circumstance or incident leaves no impression. Through all changes and chances, it remains centred in itself, immovable as fate. Here again, as with *Luria*, there can be no thought of shifting motive, of rapid transition from thought to

thought, from feeling to feeling. Such changes as there are are but ripples on the surface; the real self, the depth of the soul, remains untroubled and unmoved. The strength of the dramatist is thrown into a very different task; into the problem of rendering by speech the deepest, the most impalpable, experience of the soul. And it is only when that experience is beyond the ken of common life, when the type he selects is an exception to the familiar types of manhood, that his full strength is put forth.

The play in which these conditions are most completely fulfilled is probably *Aglavaine et Sélysette*. The personages of this play are manifestly not those of ordinary experience. Their life is not as ours. They move in an atmosphere far rarer and more ethereal than that which we commonly breathe. And it requires an effort to raise ourselves to the level on which they habitually move. Speech itself seems to give way beneath the strain they impose upon it. It becomes rather a symbol of feelings than the direct expression of any definite thought. As we listen to it we seem to hear voices from the spirit world, the music as of soul communing direct with soul. They are disembodied spirits, emanations, rather than beings of flesh and blood, belonging to the same world as ourselves.

All this is very interesting and very beautiful.

There is a sense, a very real sense, in which it is profoundly true. There are men and women who do, in fact, belong to the ideal world which Maeterlinck loves to paint; who leave on us exactly the impression which his characters are intended to convey. When we are brought face to face with such beings, we recognise that they are of a higher order than ourselves, that their home is in a region purer and brighter than our own. And when the vision is once more taken from us, we know that it is good for us to have been there and breathe, if but for an hour, "the ampler ether, the diviner air" from which we are commonly so far. But if this is so, can it be doubted that it is well for the poet to embody such creations, to bring home to the imagination that which, from the nature of things, can so seldom take shape in the experience of daily life?

Yet once again we are confronted with the question: Is the drama the fitting medium for imaginations so airy and so delicate? Do they not inevitably lose their brightness, is not that which is most distinctive of them inevitably sacrificed, when they receive a local habitation on the stage and are dragged in bodily shape before the footlights? To the reader, doubtless, this objection neither has, nor ought to have, the slightest weight. But to the spectator it is serious, if not

fatal. To him the eloquent symbolism of the poet must be apt to seem incongruous, or something worse; he is bewildered to see the Peaseblossoms and Mustardseeds of this spiritual world, like the fairies of the Pantomime, take shape as chubby children masquerading in gauze and flying on ingeniously constructed wires. Once more, the drama would seem to break down beneath the load which is put upon it, the bottles to burst with the subtle essence which the alchemist pours into them.

From this point of view, it is a relief to turn to our last dramatist, Ibsen. Here at any rate we are back with our feet on the solid earth. Here at any rate the melody is not too subtle or ethereal for the instrument charged with its conveyance. In all his greater, his more characteristic plays, the personages are true figures of flesh and blood, overflowing with energy and vitality, men and women fighting for their very lives, fighting with everything staked upon the issue, fighting round the questions which bear upon the daily lives of all of us and which come home with intense force to our experience and conscience. There is much beside this in his dramas. There is, for instance, a curious vein of mysticism, to which we must return directly. But this is the first thing to strike us in his genius, and it is this which has left the deepest mark on the history of the theatre.

The plays of Ibsen cannot, like those of Browning or Maeterlinck, be charged with undue inwardness. Few dramatists have a greater command of scenic effect. None has so persistently drawn his matter from the life, and the vital struggles, of his own day. It is this actuality, indeed, which, for our purposes, gives the main interest to his plays. It is this which forms his most significant contribution to the development of tragic drama.

Actuality, however, is one thing; realism, which we are sometimes tempted to confound with it, may be quite another. And, on the threshold, we are bound to ask ourselves whether the term "realist," so often applied to Ibsen, is justified by the facts. Few terms have been used more loosely, and few are more difficult to define. In the strict sense, as we have already seen, it would seem that realism denotes a particular method, a particular attitude of the poet or artist, toward his subject. It implies that he sets himself to reproduce the facts of human life or of outward nature with minute accuracy; without any adornment; without any attempt to use them for ulterior issues. It may also be fairly held to carry with it two further consequences. The man whom we can rightly describe as realist will be apt to exclude from his picture the more mysterious, the more impalpable elements of human character; to confine himself to those elements which lie upon the

surface, which meet us in the more usual, the more commonplace moments of our experience. He will also be apt to draw his characters from the life of his own day, to place them in the surroundings which, both to himself and those for whom he writes, are the most familiar.

Let us apply these considerations to Ibsen. In the last of the three senses here attributed to the term, he is undoubtedly a realist; and it is his chief distinction, the chief point which marks him off from other tragic dramatists, to have been so. Of all the dramatists, whose works we have considered in these lectures, he is the only one who can fairly be said to have painted the life of his own day and country; the only one who can claim to have reproduced its outward conditions, to have recorded the spiritual struggles, which during a given period—a period of ferment, if there ever was one—shook his own people to its foundations; as, from like causes, they found an echo through the whole of at least Western and Northern Europe. Calderon is the only dramatist who, in this respect, can be said to have even distantly approached him. And the picture he drew of Spanish life is so highly idealised, the romantic element in his dramas so far prevails over all the others, that the wildest imagination could never reckon him among the realists.

And what of the other two senses in which the

term realism may be legitimately used? With what justice may they be applied to the plays of Ibsen? Can it be said that it is his prime object to reproduce the facts of life with minute accuracy? Can it be said that he has excluded the more mysterious, the more imponderable, elements of human character? He would be a rash man who should venture upon either of these assertions. For, on the one hand, it must be admitted that Ibsen is much less concerned to reproduce the mere outward facts of life—least of all, the mere outward facts—with literal fidelity, than he is to drive home certain views of human character and conduct; to convince us, for instance, of the inalienable sovereignty of the individual will, and the various consequences which radiate from that, as from a common centre. And, on the other hand, if there is one thing for which he makes marked—as some may think, excessive—allowance in his scheme of life, it is the part played by the obscurer, the more mystical promptings of our nature. In illustration of the former point, I would appeal to such plays as *A Doll's House*, *The Pillars of Society*, *An Enemy of the People*. As examples of the latter, I would bring forward *The Master Builder*, *Rosmersholm*, and *The Lady from the Sea*.

Indeed, if Ibsen is open to criticism, it is from having given too much play to these tendencies, rather than too little. It is because he has made the

flag, for which his characters are fighting, somewhat too conspicuous, it is because the symbolism by which he represents the vaguer and more mysterious elements of man's nature is at times either in itself inappropriate or is obtruded on us too persistently, that he has sometimes failed, or fallen short of the success which seemed within his reach. Each of these points calls for a word of consideration.

The former of the two brings us face to face with the oft-repeated charge that his plays are problem plays, and therefore inadmissible. The first statement may be at once accepted. The sting of the charge, however, lies in the inference which is drawn from it. And here there would seem to be some confusion. That a dramatist should take a "problem" for his theme, I should say, is only to be resented if the problem remains a problem, if it is handled in an abstract fashion, if the characters are overshadowed by it, if they lack vitality, if they are wanting in that flesh and blood which is indispensable to the drama, or to any work which aims at a high imaginative effect. Now it cannot surely be alleged that Ibsen's characters, even in what may be reckoned the most aggressive of his problem plays—*A Doll's House*, perhaps, excepted—are wanting in flesh and blood. That would be the last charge one could bring against Lona Hessel, or Dr. Stockman, or—if the play to which she gives the title be indeed

a problem play—against Hedda Gabler. We may like such characters, or we may dislike them. But to describe them as lacking in vigour or vitality, to deny that they are true to life or that they are painted with high dramatic power, would, I must think, be impossible. The truth is that the problem play is as old as the world; as old as the *Oresteia* or *Antigone* or the *Book of Job*. And, unless we are prepared to bar out such creations as these, we cannot reject the plays now in question on the bare ground that they deal with problems. At the same time, I am quite willing to admit that, real as are the characters in these plays of Ibsen, and great as is the talent with which they are painted, the problem they embody is thrust upon us with somewhat too boisterous a touch, and that, at least in *The Pillars of Society* and *An Enemy of the People*, the imaginative effect is proportionally dimmed. That, however, has but a remote connection with realism, if indeed it can be said to have any at all.

The symbolism of Ibsen is a very curious question. And in *The Master Builder*, perhaps in *The Wild Duck*, it may be allowed to overshoot the mark and to come perilously near to the grotesque. But there are other plays against which this charge can in no wise be fairly brought. The white horses of *Rosmersholm*, the symbolism—assuming that it can fitly be called symbolism—of *The Lady from the Sea*,

are impressive in themselves; and it is hard to see how the imaginative idea of the dramatist could have been brought home to us so aptly by other means. Even in the case of *The Wild Duck* a very tolerable defence could probably be made out. What chiefly concerns us, however, is the purpose for which such symbolism is employed by Ibsen, and the light which it throws upon his dramatic methods and ideals. The sole object of it clearly is to indicate the vaguer and more mysterious promptings which hover dimly in the hearts of his men and women, the aspirations, perverted or otherwise, which determine their outward actions and their inmost desires or resolves. Whether in a given case the symbol chosen be appropriate, whether it be skilfully presented or no, the intention remains the same. And the man who so constantly has recourse to such symbols, and who uses them with so deliberate a purpose, manifestly cannot be the realist for which he has sometimes been mistaken.

But, if Ibsen is not a realist, at least he has certain qualities which are akin to realism, which might easily have lent themselves to the methods and purposes of the realist. This above all: that, from first to last, he has striven, as no tragic dramatist before him had striven, to cut his material from the very quick of the life of his own time; to present it without adornment and without heighten-

ing of colour; to hold up the mirror to nature, as she lay before him; "to give the very age and body of the time his form and pressure." He has done this for the outward conditions of life, as he knew it; he has done so, with still more truth and genius, for its spiritual conflicts. Here is his vital originality, and the enduring significance of his dramas.

The attempt was a bold one; and on two sides it is open to challenge. How far, we may ask, is the design itself to be reconciled with the highest ends of tragedy? And how far, the design once granted, is it worthily carried out? The latter question may conveniently be taken first.

In some of his plays, the characters, it may at once be admitted, are hardly strong enough to bear the strain which is laid upon them. In *A Doll's House*, for instance, it is hard to imagine that any woman, however fatuous her training, could have grown up in ignorance that forgery is a crime; still harder to believe that such a being would be capable of the sudden change with which she is credited by the dramatist, that the doll of the opening scenes could, at a turn of the hand, become the aggrieved and majestic idealist of the close. Yet strike out these two assumptions, and the whole drama falls in pieces. A like doubt might, at first sight, suggest itself as to the characters in *The Wild Duck*. But reflection will show that the case here is very different.

These characters, pitiful though they are and are intended to be, have at least the merit of consistency. They are drawn with amazing vividness. And the whole force of the tragedy—a tragedy in this instance fused through and through with irony—lies in the miserable self-delusions which are the source alike of their pride, their futility, and their irrecoverable ruin. With *Ghosts* we pass to yet another phase of the same question. Here is a drama, the tragedy of which lies solely in suffering, in the curse brought by the sins of the father upon the whole life and being of the son. In the character of the victim there can, from the nature of the case, be no attraction. His whole nature is shattered; the taint has entered into his very soul. All interest, save that of bare sympathy with the weak and helpless, is deliberately excluded. And we are driven to ask ourselves whether the elements of true tragedy are to be drawn from material so remorselessly confined. In the fullest and deepest sense, perhaps the answer would be that they are not. Yet who can deny that the impression left on our minds is one of the most appalling that ever dramatist has produced?

In considering *Ghosts*, we have already trenched upon the answer to our final question: How far is the scheme of Ibsen's dramas, the design as apart from the execution of it, compatible with the highest ends at which tragedy can aim? Are not his details

overloaded, his themes depressing, his characters too persistently lacking in the nobler, the more heroic, qualities, without which our sympathies remain cold? That these doubts have some foundation, I believe can hardly be denied. I question whether plays, constructed on such a model as that of *Ghosts*, could ever raise us to the purer atmosphere—the "calm of mind, all passion spent"—which the master spirits of tragic drama have habitually breathed. Before this atmosphere can create itself, there must be a sense of victory beyond defeat, of calm after the tumult, of heroism rising above weakness or degradation. And the means by which that sense is awakened the plays of Ibsen have, for the most part, deliberately renounced.

Yet this, however true it may be, is no reason for shutting our eyes to the great qualities which, as I think, Ibsen undoubtedly possesses: to his vivid presentment of the problems which distract the minds of men at the present day; to the extraordinary vividness of his characters; to the consummate subtlety with which they are often painted. The last is his highest quality, as dramatist; and it is the root of all that is most remarkable in modern tragedy. As proof of his greatness in this respect, I would point to three characters in particular: to Hedda Gabler, to Hialmar in *The Wild Duck*, and to Rebecca West in *Rosmersholm*. The two first

are types of perversity of the most diverse kinds, each of which, to most minds, will seem inexpressibly repulsive. The last is less typical; and, partly for that reason, it makes a far stronger appeal to our sympathies. What is yet more important, the play of which this woman is the heroine is one of the few plays where Ibsen has made some approach to the tragic atmosphere of which I have just spoken; where even perversion is purified by a far-off touch of heroism; where loss itself points forward to abiding gain. The other play in which, with many differences, something of the same quality is shown is, in my opinion, *The Lady from the Sea.*

This brings us to the end of the course which we mapped out at starting. And, as we look back, we may do well to ask how far our forecast has been fulfilled, how far the general lie of the road has answered our expectations. For this purpose, we are justified in fixing our eyes upon the greatest figures, in confining ourselves to the main stream of dramatic tradition. And here it is hardly possible to be mistaken. The unvarying tendency of tragedy—and even the work of Ibsen is no exception—has been from the less to the more ideal, from the less to the more inward. It has been from action to character, from the outer regions of character to those which are more secret and impalpable; to purpose, motive,

mood, temperament and instinct. This is the process which we have seen gradually unfold itself, from Æschylus to Shakespeare, from Shakespeare to Goethe and Browning. With a difference, it is the process revealed in the finest of Ibsen's prose dramas, still more in *Brand* or in *Peer Gynt*. Whether this process has always been to the advantage of the drama as an imaginative art, may be disputed. But the fact itself can hardly be denied. And, if a liberal construction be put upon the words, no better statement of the creed which, consciously or unconsciously, inspired those who carried forward this revolution step by step can be given than the pregnant lines of Wordsworth :—

> Action is transitory—a step, a blow,
> The motion of a muscle—this way or that—
> 'Tis done, and in the after vacancy
> We wonder at ourselves like men betrayed;
> Suffering is permanent, obscure and dark,
> And shares the nature of infinity.

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